

# Part I

## THE NEED FOR INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON



# PERSPECTIVE THROUGH INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON IN THE EVALUATION OF FAMILY SUPPORT

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The aim of this book is to contribute to cross-national exploration of family support in search of a better understanding of what it entails and how it is best evaluated. The varied content in the chapters that follow, and the tone of serious engagement apparent in them all, are ample evidence of continuing enthusiasm for family support—‘probably the primary policy matter facing child welfare’ (Frost, 1997, p. 201). At the same time, the material presented here is a register of the difficulties and complexities, both conceptual and operational, that still surround the term. This chapter considers why this double message exists. It also considers the place of evaluation in developing policy and practice in this context and why it is helpful to use international comparisons in developing both an understanding of family support and the appropriate means for evaluating it. In that way the chapter opens out an agenda against which the range of contributions which follow in the subsequent chapters can be considered. It also provides a means for considering, in the light of those contributions, whether it is desirable and feasible to work towards a unified, global view and what evaluation has to offer the future development of family support.

## **CLARIFICATION THROUGH COMPARISON**

Family support is a perspective on child welfare that is born of a dilemma. The special place of the family in meeting social care needs is widely accepted, but so too is it recognised that the contemporary forms and functions of family life

are under immense pressure. This dilemma impacts on all family members, but is particularly pertinent to those who have a high degree of dependence—not only children, the primary focus of this book, but also elderly people and people with disabilities. The capacity of families to cope with social care needs also has major implications for the form and function of state services. Given the widespread experience of high-cost, low-quality care where the state has attempted a solution by directly substituting its own services for family life, the best way forward for both the state and families would seem to be to prevent the necessity for such invasive interventions through the development of family support.

It would be wrong, however, to regard the promotion of family support as just a pragmatic response to managing necessary change in the relationship between the state and family life. In regard to children, family support is also a principled position in line with the global aspirations of the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Although the historic importance of the UNCRC is primarily the recognition it gives to children in their own right, it also places special emphasis on supporting the family in carrying out its caring and protective functions.

The family, as the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth and well being of all its members and particularly children, should be afforded the necessary protection and assistance so that it can fully assume its responsibilities within the community. (Hill and Tisdall, 1997, Appendix)

Family support appears to be a necessary and appropriate means of achieving a new and effective way to deliver services. It is based on the use of the power and authority of the state to promote welfare through enhancing parental capacity and responsibility within the context of the family as a key institution of civil society.

Yet, as most people working in the area will attest, family support as public policy and its expression in service provision is no simple matter. Reviewing the literature shows that, despite its deep roots in the history of child welfare, family support as a coherent policy and practice perspective is still at a relatively early stage in its development (Pinkerton et al., 2000). Although there is widespread commitment to family support, including legislative mandates, there exists considerable confusion and debate over what exactly it means in policy terms and whether it is a policy that can be made to work in practice through the development of projects and programmes. What constitutes family support is open to both narrow and broad definitions. These difficulties revolve around clarifying value-based welfare assumptions as much as they reflect the limitations of existing empirical data about what constitute the necessary ingredients for a successful family support project or programme. Lurking in the shadows of the debate there is also an uncomfortable recognition that it is only through extensive political, social and economic changes

that the systemic shift can be achieved that is necessary to place family support at the centre of any childcare system.

One means of helping to clarify and grapple with the various dimensions to family support, and test its effectiveness, is to explore these issues through comparing and contrasting existing evaluations of policy and practice in the area. There is a general view, not necessarily substantiated, that family support has benefited from the increased use of evaluation as a means of understanding and judging both the process and outcomes of service delivery in order to improve planning, resourcing and practice in all areas of child welfare. Evaluation is recognised as having an important part to play in advancing the policy and practice goals of citizenship, consumerism, quality control, value for money, performance measurement, and public accountability. This, in part, reflects 'the context of the changing political economy of social welfare in which evaluation has become a significant managerialist strategy for efficiency and control' (Everitt and Hardiker, 1996, p. 19). It also represents a concern for critical reflection and the resulting empowerment of both practitioners and service users.

Comparison has the potential to take understanding of family support beyond the present situation of a rich but disparate pool of descriptive case studies which can only be loosely cross-referenced by the prescriptive generalities that make up so much of the family support literature. Comparison allows for patterns of convergence and divergence to emerge and, through attempts to answer what lies behind these patterns, sharpens the focus on what constitutes the essential features of effective family support—or indeed whether or not such core features exist. Comparing the results of evaluation also helps to assess the strengths and weaknesses of evaluation. In particular, comparison can help in the necessary exploration of the limits and possibilities of evaluation as a means of highlighting and suggesting responses to difficulties within family support that reflect issues of social and political power. These find expression in the micro politics of family support within the relationships between disciplines, professions, organisations and sectors and across the divides between commissioners, providers and service users. The politics of family support also beg questions about much broader societal processes and structures.

To benefit from maximum diversity in making comparisons it seems sensible to draw material from as wide a range of contexts as possible. Accordingly, making use of existing contacts and the ease of international communication enabled by the widespread use of English and e-mail, material has been gathered for this book from a range of countries across the globe. It is, nevertheless, important to stress that no claim is being made to the representative nature of the contributions. It is clear from even the most cursory glance at the contents page that the coverage is restricted, as well as enabled, by the common language and access to information technology. It is also important to recognise that such opportunistic sampling cannot easily provide either integrated

data or theory. At some point the priority for advancing understanding of family support may well be international meta-analyses and cross-national multi-site studies which can confidently identify global pressures and trends and benchmark policy and practice. But a working assumption behind the production of this book is that the development of family support has not yet reached that point.

It is increasingly acknowledged that developments in any single country cannot be explained without setting them in the context of wider—global—changes. Yet there is a danger that the new orthodoxy may make it rather easy to espouse a comparative approach without being quite clear why or what questions can be most helpfully illuminated through comparison. (Cochrane, 1993, p. 1)

The pertinent questions at this time are more descriptive than prescriptive. Concern needs to be with clarifying how family support in varied national contexts is being understood:

- What does the term mean to its advocates and practitioners and to those intended to benefit from it?
- How is it expressed in policy terms?
- In what organisational settings is it regarded as being practised?
- Are there particular intervention programmes associated with it?
- What aspects of a programme or setting have to be described if the substance of the support is to be grasped?

Thus the aim of this book is to give the contributors an open platform to share how, in their particular circumstances and from their various perspectives, they are making sense of family support and the appropriate method of evaluating it. Through the experiences, concepts, and methodologies shared, the intended result is to provide a set of international reference points. These reference points can then be used to provide fresh ideas and new perspectives that can help in surfacing the dimensions that tend to lie hidden behind the overarching concept of family support. In this way it is hoped that more insightful and radical thinking will be encouraged and a sense of direction become apparent.

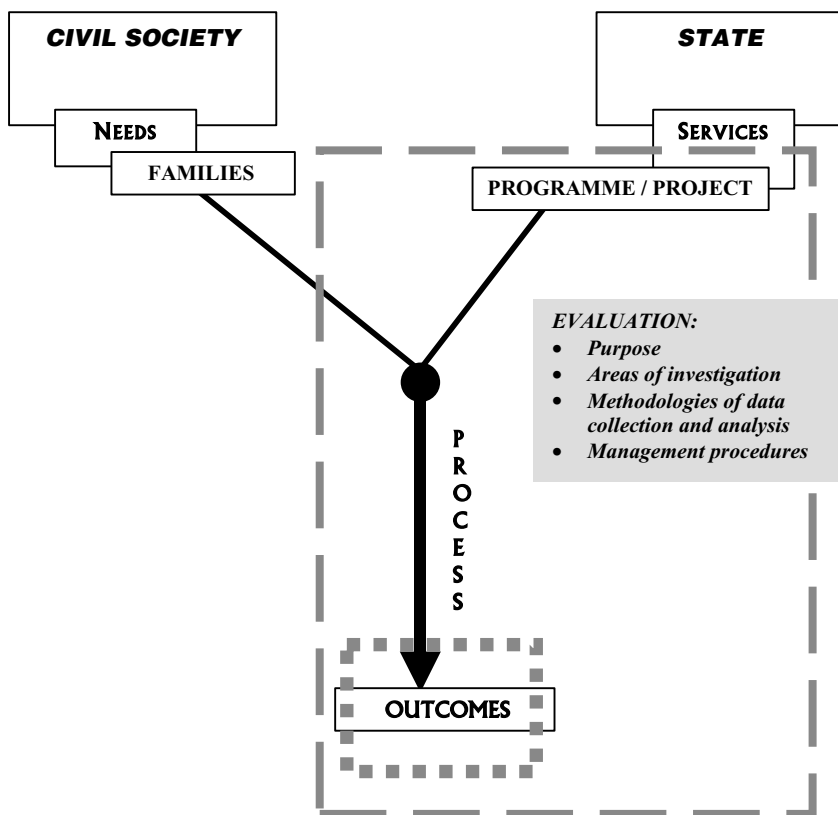
Given that family support is a field characterised by a disorientating degree of variety, the very open approach to comparison being adopted for this book makes it difficult to identify the detail and the substance of the differences and similarities within the material presented. A clear, albeit provisional, conceptual framework or model is required to help to engage with the variety of ideas and experiences being shared. As Titmus, a major figure in the development of post-war British social policy, observed: 'the purpose of model building is not to admire the architecture, but to help us to see some order in all the

disorder and confusion of facts, systems and choices' (quoted by Hardiker et al., 1991b, p. 18). The model required here to help with establishing some order needs to give equal attention to the substantive issues of family support and to methods of evaluation (see Figure 1.1). A basic assumption behind the production of this book is that family support is at a stage in its development where questions about how best to evaluate it are as important as questions about the nature of the provision itself. If significant advances are to be made, not only does more attention need to be given to describing and analysing the forms and functions of family support, but there is also a need to give priority to understanding how best to undertake that description and analysis. Evaluations need to reflect the traditional research process of problem definition, research design, execution and report, but must do so in a way that is fitted to the present state of knowledge about the policy and practice of family support and in a way that extends the existing methodologies used to research this area.

## THINKING ABOUT FAMILY SUPPORT

In thinking about family support, the central message given by the combined framework in Figure 1.1 is that, as with any child welfare issue, the focus must be on the relationship between *needs, services, processes* and *outcomes*. For family support this means giving attention to needs generated within the family as a key institution of civil society and services provided through projects and programmes delivered directly or indirectly by the state. The state, as used here, can be defined as 'a set of agencies claiming supreme authority for the co-ordination and continuity of a population within a particular territory, backed by a virtual monopoly of force' (McLennan et al., 1984, p. 3). Civil society is 'all those social institutions and relationships which arise, through voluntary association, outside the sphere of direct state control' (McIntosh, 1984, p. 20). These definitions usefully draw attention to the interdependence of state and civil society, in that each is defined by contrast to the other. They also draw attention to the relationships between power and authority, which constitute both types of social institution.

Figure 1.1 presents the relationship between family need in civil society and family support as services provided in the main by the state. That relationship unfolds as a process down a time line that results in outcomes for those involved. From this perspective it is clear that while it is essential to focus on the dynamic between the four-core components (needs, services, process and outcomes), there are key issues for clarification in relation to each of them. As regards need, this requires attention to what exactly are the needs in question and why do they require support services? An initial response to those questions is to say that the needs are for social care that was met



**Figure 1.1** Family support evaluation: A combined framework

in the past by the family but which that core institution of civil society is no longer capable of meeting. Social care is defined here as: ‘the sum of the helping (and when needs be controlling) resources available . . . informally by community networks or formally by the public services’ (NISW, 1982). Today in regard to social care, just as with education and health at earlier points in history, state intervention is required to supplement the capacity of the family as a social institution. That, however, is to beg questions about the special role of the family in relation to social care.

Despite a general recognition of the central place of the family as an institution providing social care within civil society, defining what a family is today and was in the past proves difficult (Crow and Allen, 2000). Close consideration shows that the term ‘is both ambiguous and emotive’ (Hill and Tisdall, 1997, p. 65). It encompasses a fluid mix of ideas and empirical material covering biological relatedness, parent/child role sets, shared living arrangements within a single household, and long-term bonds of affection

and mutual obligation. The contradictory nature of family life has also been commented on. 'While it is true that many of our happiest moments and closest relationships are within families... there are also a whole range of negative experiences in families ranging from plain unhappiness to abuse, neglect and exploitation' (Frost and Stein, 1989, p. 5). The family not only provides the context for its members to provide each other with mutually rewarding continuity and stability, but is also the site of gender inequality, domestic violence, child abuse and all kinds of power struggles between and among children and adults.

It is also generally accepted that while the focus can differ in degree, any satisfactory understanding of the family must take into account both relationships within the family and relationships between the family and its immediate neighbourhood and wider societal context. The complexity, pressures and change which characterise contemporary family life reflect not only shifting cultural expectations about personal relationships but also changing patterns of work, housing, transport and leisure within the context of national and global socio-economic structures of inequality. Changes in the structure and context of family life have coincided and contributed to a moral uncertainty surrounding the institution. Although it is not sustainable to make an exclusive claim for any particular family arrangement, there are, within the UK, certain periodic attempts to reassert a link between the positive outcomes of family life and what traditionally has been regarded as the morally accepted family form, based on two-parent heterosexual marriage (Home Office, 1998; Morgan, 1998). These attempts to shore up past certainties are expressed in a number of ways: blaming individual family members for the perceived failures in family functioning; couples lack commitment to one another and their children; mothers and fathers lack the skills and motivation to provide satisfactory parenting; children lack self-discipline and respect for authority. More positively there has also been a growing interest in parenting, which, along with education and employment, is seen as one of the major routes to social inclusion. There is increasing research aimed at understanding parents' own perceptions of their role, which shows that they feel a need for information, advice and counselling. Linked with that there is a growing body of research demonstrating the effectiveness of interventions aimed at improving parenting skills and addressing problems associated with bringing up children (Moorman et al., 2001).

An alternative response to the uncertainty and diversity of present-day family life is to shift from a structural functionalism to a concern for the quality of the experience of family members as they negotiate their lives together, whether it is within a nuclear, extended, reconstituted, lone-parent or substitute family. This open, interactive perspective seems more accurately and helpfully to address the difficulties in identifying the contemporary functions and features of family. Using this perspective Porter

(quoted in Pithouse and Lindsell, 1995) has identified the role of the 'good' family as being to:

- instil cultural, social, spiritual, and moral values
- support the social, emotional and material needs of family members
- nurture and provide socially necessary care
- aim for the well-being of all family members
- provide security, belonging, connectedness and companionship
- foster a sense of moral obligation to others.

Given the prolonged and regular interaction required to negotiate, in a sustained fashion, the diversity and detail involved in such outcomes, it is reasonable to assume that they will be achieved in the main within the informal social care networks of kinship, friendship and neighbourhood. However, it is necessary to be mindful of how oppressive relations of inequality based on class, race, gender and age can also be expressed and sustained within these networks (Crow and Allen, 2000). Despite the limitations of these networks, especially when they struggle with conditions of adversity, it is within them that the necessary affection, sense of mutual obligation, energy, creativity, continuity and stability are to be found.

The intermeshing of state and civil society has already been noted. Even those informal social care networks that are best able to optimise the quality of life experienced by family members will still draw on more formal services as required. From the perspective on need being suggested here, the challenge for formal services in understanding and responding to family need is no longer a question of making good the deficits within family functioning, linked or not to particular family structures. The issue for formal state services becomes how to ensure the relationships and resources required within the informal networks to achieve positive, subjectively experienced, quality of life outcomes. This opens wide the possibilities of stating those services that might be classified as support. As one senior social services manager interviewed in a Northern Ireland study of family support observed: 'Family support is whatever supports families' (Pinkerton et al., 2000, p. 11). Similarly, the Audit Commission in England and Wales, when searching for an operational definition, ended up with: 'any activity or facility provided either by statutory agencies or by community groups or individuals, aimed at providing advice and support to parents to help them in bringing up their children' (Audit Commission, 1994, p. 39).

Family support services draw on a continuum of interventions from the specialist therapeutic through to community and self-help. It includes pre-natal classes, early childhood education, parent education, day care, family centres, after school clubs, home and school liaison, child abuse and neglect prevention programmes, neighbourhood-based resource centres and mutual help support groups. The danger of such an inclusive view is that family support

as a term loses any useful meaning. One solution to this is not to try to find a neatly bounded definition that includes or excludes particular activities, programmes or projects. Instead it is accepted that what, at any time and in any place, should be regarded as family support is contingent on a mixture of factors: the definition, level and assessment of existing need; the existing and potential capacity of informal social care networks within particular families and neighbourhoods; the services that are being provided or could be developed; and the general social policy goals being pursued.

If this contingent perspective is taken, as with the approach to the family suggested above, it is not so much the form but the quality of the relationships associated with family support that become its distinctive characteristic. This is in line with the view that family support is best seen as a set of prescriptive values.

Chief among these values is a deep respect for the complex tasks involved in family care giving, particularly parenting. The relationship between parent and professional is defined as essentially collegial... active partners in search of formal and informal supports necessary to carry out the difficult tasks of parenting. (Whittaker, 1993, p. 6)

From that value base, and drawing on what is known from evaluations of a range of family support and preventative projects and programmes within the UK, seven key characteristics can be identified:

- partnership with users
- creative and responsive services
- attention to outreach and engagement
- siting in the home or neighbourhood
- understanding and respect for issues of race and culture
- interagency and interdisciplinary co-operation
- clarity about the relationship to child protection.

Partnership with both children and adult service users provides the foundation for creative and responsive services (Pinkerton, 2001). Without it there cannot be effective outreach and engagement, which is where some of the most difficult and critical practice challenges to family support lie. If contact is not made and engagement is not successfully negotiated, there cannot be the unfolding process through which family support is expressed. Siting family support services in the home or neighbourhood of those using them is not only an effective means of outreach but also introduces resources into local social care networks. Building capacity in this way helps with the linking of isolated individuals and families to existing informal support systems. It also sensitises services to the cultural context within which they need to work. Within the UK, despite general recognition of the promise and challenge of

ethnic diversity, there has been limited progress in this area: 'there appears to be little or no recognition that some change in the way we organise the protection of children or the support of families may be necessary because of the failure to protect black children or to support black families.' (Butt and Box, 1998, p. 8). Interagency and interdisciplinary cooperation is another area which, despite long-standing recognition of its importance, seems extraordinarily difficult to achieve.

A particularly important dimension in defining family support is the relationship between it and child protection. The interface between child protection and family support is dealt with differently in different parts of the world (Gilbert, 1997; Hetherington, Chapter 6 in this volume). In some countries the issue is dealt with in a much more holistic way than is possible in the English-speaking world. Nevertheless these dilemmas are part of family support work throughout the world. Opinions range from regarding child protection and family support as opposite ends of the child welfare spectrum to the view that family support is child protection or that family support is a way of preventing child abuse. Within the UK, since the publication of an influential summary and commentary on a set of 20 government-funded research studies into child protection (Department of Health, 1995a, 1995b), the debate has been about how to integrate family support and child protection in a way that neither stigmatises support services nor lowers safety thresholds to a level that endangers children (Department of Health, 1994; Harper, 1996; Parton, 1997).

Achieving the desired integration in practice is extremely challenging. On one level child protection can be regarded as an important but not dominant aspect of family support. From this perspective the need for protection can be seen as one of many needs which children can have. Child protection work can therefore be integrated into a more holistic approach to family work. Even in emergencies, when the child has to be removed, the basic attitude is one of trust. However, that is not how it tends to be in practice. Child protection looms much larger. It is subject to different guidance and different laws and, most fundamentally, a completely different mind frame—while family support is voluntary and consensual, child protection involves risk assessment, surveillance and suspicion. Integrating child protection with family support requires practitioners to be open to working simultaneously in a 'supportive' and a 'suspicious' frame of mind. Practitioners have to behave in an authoritative way while avoiding being authoritarian and exercising power arbitrarily. They also have to try to keep in mind the different and competing needs of family members. The fundamental dilemma for practitioners is not that they have to negotiate the positioning of a case on a continuum from 'care' to 'control' but rather that they have to keep in mind two potentially incompatible ways of thinking about their work.

Policy makers and practitioners have struggled with this problem in the UK for over a decade and it will be posed sharply once again by the Victoria

Climbié inquiry—a public inquiry set up to review the death of an 8-year-old girl from West Africa who was killed by her great aunt and her aunt's boyfriend ([www-victoria-climbie-inquiry.org.uk](http://www-victoria-climbie-inquiry.org.uk)). This case was dealt with as a low risk family support problem and practitioners ignored warning signs because the case was not labelled 'child abuse'. It remains to be seen whether that inquiry will find a way to go beyond what has been the general approach of developing increasingly detailed guidance. The latest version of the *Working Together* government guidance on child protection (Department of Health, 1999) attempts to address the issue through giving complex guidance as to how to manage the different processes involved. This procedural approach has affected family support in various ways. For example, even small voluntary agencies providing informal support to families or working with children are now required to have detailed child protection policies, and to carry out police checks on their staff and volunteers. The administrative and accountability issues are becoming an increasing burden for the management of these services. Even where family support has been seen as a way of preventing abuse, procedures are in evidence. Sure Start, one of the UK government's major investments in preventive family services, has the lowering of re-registrations on the child protection register as one of its four core targets. It also has detailed guidance on child protection issues and a clear requirement for all funded services to have child protection policies and to train practitioners in child protection issues.

## THINKING ABOUT EVALUATION

A basic premise of this book is that the complexity and confusion that is apparent within the field of family support can be helpfully addressed through evaluation. This is because evaluation allows for 'both the generation of evidence about an activity, a policy, a programme or a project, and the process of making judgements about its value' (Everitt and Hardiker, 1996, p. 4). That, however, is not to suggest that evaluation, as an approach to understanding and as a means to effectively develop family support, is without its own difficulties. Evaluation is represented in Figure 1.1 as potentially encompassing each of which encompasses the different aspects of family support to different degrees. The broken lines indicate that it is possible (a) to focus an evaluation solely on outcomes, (b) to widen it out to the programme/project, the process that unfolds in its work and its outcomes, or (c) to take the widest focus possible considering every aspect of family support from the nature of civil society and the state down to the specific outcomes being achieved by a particular programme/project.

Figure 1.1 draws attention to four key aspects of evaluation: purpose; areas of investigation; methodologies of data collection and analysis; and management procedures. As regards purpose there is the tension between evaluation

as a tool of managerialist control and as a method of empowerment for front-line staff and service users. In addition to that central and often unacknowledged issue, there are other questions that require to be considered:

- What should be the areas of investigation for an evaluation?
- What attention should be given to understanding need and what balance should be struck between need as expressed in the lives of particular families and its context within civil society?
- To understand services, how much attention should be given to the nature of the state and the policy framework in which a project is working?
- What weight should be given to the various aspects of the organisational context?
- Should evaluation be primarily concerned to understand process or to measure outcome?
- What techniques for data collection and analysis are available, appropriate and effective?
- What procedures should be followed in managing the various stages of an evaluation?

One reaction to the fact that, at present, these are difficult and, at times, contentious questions for family support evaluators, is to regard them as evidence of the underdeveloped state of evaluation in the area. The implicit assumption is that as evaluators become more skilled consensus will emerge as to how best these questions should be answered. Such a view is consistent with what has been called the 'engineering model' of applied research. In this model the development of a policy or practice solution is seen as a direct output of evaluation. The purpose is clear: to solve the commissioner's problem. If this is not being achieved, attention needs to be given to improving technical competence in the areas of design, execution and reporting. An alternative view regards such privileging of evaluation and technical competence as naive. Based on a 'limestone model' of applied research, it anticipates that the impact of an evaluation will take time and will be indirect and quite possibly unintended like water entering and gradually percolating through limestone without it being clear where or when it will emerge, and probably only then as a trickle (McWhirter, 1993). Such effect as there is will largely be mediated by other more influential social, technical, economic and political factors (Kelly, 1998).

A third perspective is possible which allows for the realities that prompt the other two but does not require choosing between them. Evaluation can be seen to be about developing a technically rigorous understanding of a practice or policy issue in order to contribute to the effective management of the issue, and at the same time it can be acknowledged that the contribution of evaluation is only one part of a complex interplay between a range of influences. This 'social system model' of applied research (Pinkerton, 1998) focuses on

change as a function of systemic interaction expressing social structural and interpersonal power relations. From this perspective evaluation is accepted as inevitably being a continuous, recursive, highly divergent and emergent process that is likely to have a range of both predictable and unpredictable outcomes. Evaluation is itself part of the negotiated social construction of what it is that is being evaluated and, in turn, what is being evaluated can significantly determine what constitutes evaluation.

Whatever the limitations on its influence, basic to maximising the impact of an evaluation is ensuring the technical competence and scientific rigour that informs it. This does not necessarily mean solely pursuing quasi-experimental hypothesis testing, designed to come as close to randomised controlled trials as can be achieved. There is a growing recognition that sterile debate between this or that type of evaluation, and in particular about the status of randomised controlled trials, has to be replaced with a more graded and interlocking view of different methods (Hill, 1998; Gilligan, 2000). What is required is to ensure that methods are chosen which are appropriate for the purpose of the particular evaluation. Rather than think in terms of a hierarchy of methods it is more helpful to think of a repertoire, covering experimental, quasi-experimental, descriptive and action research techniques, which can be selected according to their fitness for purpose.

Choices made about methods will go some way to determining the techniques available for both data collection and analysis. That said, whatever method is chosen or developed, it will be important to ensure that the associated techniques combine methodological rigour and objectivity with the capacity to judge the real world substance, function and worth of the setting or practice being considered. One means of increasing methodological rigour is the use of standardised measures, particularly where these can provide a baseline of existing or deficient psychosocial functioning within families. Such baselines are essential for later measurement and assessment of the impact of family support interventions. Capacity to demonstrate effectiveness in this, or any other, way is likely to grow in importance for research on family support. There is a wide variety of measurements of individual health and well-being, family functioning and social support available. Attempts have been made to identify and test how useful such instruments are for evaluating family support (Pithouse et al., 1998; McAuley, 1999; Statham, 2000), but, as yet, within the UK there is no definitive guide to their relationship to one another, their appropriateness for particular tasks, or their ethical implications.

Managing the evaluation process is as important as choice of method and instruments. This starts with the negotiating of acceptance by those delivering the services and those using them. This brings with it important ethical issues about informed consent which need serious consideration, not least in relation to children (McAuley, 1998). The fuller the active involvement of service users and staff, the better the research is likely to be. Although it is resource intensive, work on ensuring involvement pays dividends in increased

participation, clearer and better understood instruction, improved accuracy and standardisation, and effective checks against a whole range of errors to which the researcher is prone as an outsider. One family support study in England directly involved users and providers in determining the indicators for evaluating a programme (Frost, 1996). Engagement and participation by stakeholders should start as early as possible in the research process and continue throughout (Pinkerton, 1998). A participatory approach to managing family support evaluation needs to include discussion about likely time frames, expected levels of involvement and continuing feedback. It is important to recognise that there are real concerns to be addressed for the evaluator when taking this approach, about loss of objectivity and restricting the range of research tools available for use.

In any evaluation of family support a balance must be struck between the demands of technically achievable, objective measurement and the need to adequately represent and address the fundamental purpose of the policy or practice. 'Evaluation is not a search for cause and effect, an inventory of present status, or a prediction of future success. It is something of all of these, but only as they contribute to understanding substance, function and worth' (Stake and Denny, quoted in Everitt and Hardiker, 1996, p. 52).

The particular balance struck between these two aspects of evaluation determines the extent to which any particular piece of work is formative or summative in character.

- Formative evaluation is concerned with providing information for policy or practice improvement, modification and management and its focus is on process, but can include measures of effectiveness in achieving desired outcomes.
- Summative, or impact, evaluation is concerned primarily with determining how effective a particular policy or practice has been in achieving its stated outcomes.

These two types of evaluation are not exclusive alternatives but rather ends of a continuum. In the immediate to mid-term future, variations on formative evaluation are likely to offer most to family support: not least because the policy context is likely to remain fluid. The challenge facing evaluators is how best to develop the scientific sophistication of the methods they use while more firmly embedding the process, from commission through design and execution to impact, in the lived realities of policy and practice.

## **ADDRESSING AN OPEN AGENDA**

As stated at the start of this chapter the aim of this book is to provide an open platform for contributors to share how, in their particular circumstances and

from their various perspectives, they are making sense of family support and the appropriate means to evaluate it—in other words, how they are dealing with the issues discussed in the previous two sections. The result is a rich mix, ranging across all aspects of the combined framework of Figure 1.1. The five chapters in Part II highlight a range of underpinning issues of relevance for any evaluation of family support. Jane Tunstill (Chapter 2) draws out a challenging set of political, conceptual and technical issues. What she has to say about such issues as social policy shifts, competing approaches among evaluators, the ‘slippery concept’ of need, the ‘thorny issue’ of outcome, reaching the user and the absence of satisfactory baseline and contextual data makes it very clear that all the aspects of Figure 1.1 are in dynamic interplay with one another.

Having a secure conceptual base is a major asset in grappling with the challenges identified by Tunstill, and the next two chapters each detail a key concept of particular relevance to family support. May-Chahal, Katz and Cooper (Chapter 3) discuss ‘social inclusion’ within the context of an ecological approach as a means of drawing issues of poverty, employment, community, and inequality of opportunity into the family support frame. They not only deal with the theoretical aspects of the term but also with how it can be operationalised. Although this is not a new perspective, there is growing attention to resilience as a key research and practice concept within child welfare and Gilligan (Chapter 4) argues for its place in family support and its evaluation. He too combines discussion of the constituent elements of the concept, and of family support, with consideration of how it might be operationalised in practice by those providing services and those evaluating them. In the other two chapters in this part of the book, Pecora (Chapter 5) and Hetherington (Chapter 6) demonstrate the case for taking a comparative view. Pecora shares a typology of family-centred services which he uses to review and draw out general messages from a large number of separate projects and evaluations carried out across America in varied circumstances. Hetherington discusses a number of inter-country comparative projects in Europe, in one example extended to Australia, to show how it is possible to uncover the characteristics of social welfare structures and the values and unspoken assumptions that help to determine how they function.

In Part III a set of nine evaluation ‘case studies’ are presented from around the world: America, Australia, Hong Kong, Ireland, New Zealand, Sweden and the United Kingdom. In the first of these Hazlett (Chapter 7), from the vantage point of a senior civil servant, discusses the place of family support and its evaluation within the Republic of Ireland. She describes the development of a family policy that not only recognises the traditional valuing of family but also sees family support as necessary to sustain the recent growth of the ‘Celtic Tiger’ economy. She highlights the role of government-commissioned evaluation in the development of the policy and in its application. Two academics, Cheung and Law (Chapter 8), focus on the experience

of one of the original Asian Tiger economies, Hong Kong, to describe the historical development of family services in 'a multi-cultural environment connecting the East and the West'. They identify the place of evaluation within this development and discuss contemporary issues such as service quality standards, process audits, culturally relevant outcome measures and information technology. They advocate the future use of an evaluation framework based on credibility, creativity, cultural sensitivity, feasibility and result utility.

Cultural sensitivity is also a major theme in the description and discussion of an evaluation involving a large national family support agency in New Zealand by Sanders and Munford, a social work academic and an agency-based researcher and policy analyst (Chapter 9). They use the experience of this three-stage programme, which has been underway since 1994, to tease out key features in the design and execution of inclusive evaluation, not least the ethical concerns. They also present findings from their national context on the factors that contribute to effective family support. The varied family support services of another voluntary organisation, the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, covering England, Scotland and Northern Ireland, are the subject of Gardner's review of the process and findings of a two-stage evaluation (Chapter 10). While measuring change in the lives of children and parents was the major aim, the evaluators were also interested in 'aggregated scores for networks and views of the neighbourhood to produce a community climate score'.

Community has an important place in the three chapters that follow. In the case of Quiry and her colleagues (Chapter 11), the Early Years Project in Northern Ireland, which this team of university-based social psychologists evaluated, was explicitly part of a local urban community regeneration initiative. They set out the theoretical foundations of their work as a transactional model of early child development and an ecological model of the individual in the community, describe their set of questionnaires instruments and present findings suggesting some gains for both mothers and children. Budde's account (Chapter 12) is of a four-site evaluation of a major American foundation's Community Partnership for Protecting Children Initiative. The goal of this initiative is to enhance the ability of entire communities to keep children safe from abuse and neglect, drawing on both the strengths of informal social networks within neighbourhoods and the services of public and private agencies. Attention is given in the chapter to cross-site issues that are particularly apparent in an evaluation of this scale, such as uniform application of a theory of change and the collection of comparable information in diverse circumstances. The evaluation of two local community-based projects for children and young people in the west of Ireland, one at the start of the 1990s and the other at the end, are the subject of the contribution in Chapter 13 from Canavan, a career researcher and Dolan, primarily an operational manager. They show how wider social policy change facilitated and directed

developments in both family support services and their evaluation. They also suggest that greater sophistication in evaluation techniques does not of itself ensure that evaluators develop the necessary critical perspective on the needs and services involved in family support.

The last two case studies of Part III come from Sweden and Australia and both concern national programmes. Shochet and Ham (Chapter 14), university-based psychologists, describe a universal family and school-based programme developed as part of the Australian Mental Health Strategy to reduce the incidence of depression in adolescents. The theoretical underpinnings and the content of the Resourceful Adolescent Programme for young people and its parallel programme for parents are described, along with the controlled trial of their effectiveness. The contact person/family service is the most frequently used statutory child welfare service in Sweden. Yet as Andersson (Chapter 15) points out, this form of family support, positioned between universal child welfare services and services to children at risk, has been subject to very little evaluation. From her position as an academic researcher and teacher, she describes the work that has been undertaken, including her own, which gave particular attention to evaluating the scheme from the perspectives of the four key types of actor involved—the social workers, the volunteer contact families, the children and young people, and their families.

The chapters that make up Parts II and III of the book draw on a limited but varied range of national experiences. They highlight and detail the aspects of family support and its evaluation that are suggested by the combined framework of Figure 1.1 and discussed in the earlier sections of this chapter. The book ends (Chapter 16) by revisiting both those issues and, in the light of the experiences, concepts, and methodologies shared in the preceding chapters, asks three questions:

- What is emerging as the key themes of convergence and divergence internationally?
- Is it desirable and feasible to work towards a unified global view of family support?
- What has evaluation to offer the future development of family support world wide?

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