



# EVALUATING RESEARCH EVIDENCE

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ISSER DRUSSA Executive Training on  
**Accessing Research**  
**18-19 May 2015**

Adapted from UJ-BCURE (2014, Sept) Appraising evidence. University of Johannesburg. Published via the Africa Evidence Network. [www.africaevidencenetwork.org/](http://www.africaevidencenetwork.org/)



## Questions to be answered in this session

- In your work, what is considered to be evidence, on the basis of which decisions may be taken?
- Where does research fit into this?
- By what standards is research evaluated?

# What is evidence?

- In your unit/department/ministry, what is considered to be good evidence?
  - In what form should it come?
  - From what sources?
- What forms of evidence do you usually access in your work?
  - How do you personally rank these different sources?



# Research as evidence

- How is research viewed?
- Which sources are seen as most credible?
- In what form is it most used/appreciated?



# What is good research evidence?

- From this course that you've done, on what basis would you evaluate the quality of any research?

# Standards of good quality research as evidence

- It should add to existing knowledge.
- It should be timely/relevant.
- It should be trustworthy/credible.
  - Based on rigorous methodological approach in
    - Design
    - Conduct
    - Analysis
    - Conclusion

# Standards of good quality research as evidence

- Rigor in design
  - Coherence in all parts of the design.
  - Use of appropriate methods.
  - Addresses questions of validity and reliability.
- Rigor in conduct
  - Conducted ethically.
  - Explicit explanation of what was done and why.
  - Description of research setting.
- Rigor in analysis and conclusions
  - Explanation of how data was analysed.
  - Conclusions have a basis in the data/are supported by the data.
  - Comparison of findings of those of other research studies.
  - Acknowledgement of the limitations of the study.

# Signs of 'bad' research

- It does not make clear what it is adding to existing knowledge.
- There is little consistency/coherence in the research question, methods and analysis.
- The research design and methods are not made explicit.
- The research methods are not made explicit.
- There is no/little information on the research context and sample.
- Strong conclusions/recommendations are made on the basis of little evidence (e.g. a quote from one person or a finding in a subset of the sample).
- The conclusions seem to be one-sided/biased (does not take account of competing explanations).
- There is no description of the limitations of the study.

# Sources of 'bias' in the real world

- Research is not accepted simply because it is rigorously conducted. There are other considerations in the 'real' world of policymaking:
  - Competing explanations or conclusions, based on conventional or popular thinking.
  - The political value or fall-out of accepting research evidence.
  - Pressure from interest groups.
  - Personal values/biases.
  - Way in which the research is presented (policy brief, summary, etc.)
  - Others?

# Useful Resources

## Manuals:

- Appraisal of Guidelines for Research & Evaluation (AGREE)
- Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) has checklists for appraisal (quantitative / qualitative)
- DFID (2014) Assessing the strength of evidence. 'How to' note
- ODI (2006) A toolkit for progressive policymakers in developing countries
- Spencer et al (2006) *Quality in Qualitative Evaluation: A framework for assessing research evidence* (Appraisal tool for qualitative data)

## Websites:

- Coalition for Evidence-based policy (checklists, videos, seminars, etc.)
- Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Coordinating Centre (EPPI-Centre)