

Improving knowledge transfer; views of researchers and policy makers

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Aims and Objectives

- To assess the use of research in formulating policy in the area of drug and alcohol misuse among adolescents.
- To identify:
 - In what context research was successful in making an impact
 - The pathways/linkages and exchange models
- To explore:
 - The views of researchers and policy makers on the use of evidence in policy making
 - To test the Research Impact Framework (Kuruvilla et al. 2006) as a tool for researchers in assessing the impact of their work

Methodology

- Retrospective case study
 - Three embedded units of analyses
 - Public available policy documents 2001 -2012 on alcohol and drugs were examined
 - 16 key informant interviews:
 - Researchers
 - Policy makers

Phase 2: Qualitative interviews

Interview guide policy makers

Topic	Types of questions
Demographic and descriptive data	No. of years working Gender Educational level Grade/employment title
Job description	Role played in the formulation of new policy implementation/ evaluation of programmes/ literature reviews Analysis of statistical data/ locating the evidence
Policy areas	Factors driving policy on alcohol and drugs Changes over time Influences on policy
Research evidence	Kinds of evidence ministers/policy makers find convincing/ how can it be improved/researchers help to improve the impact of evidence

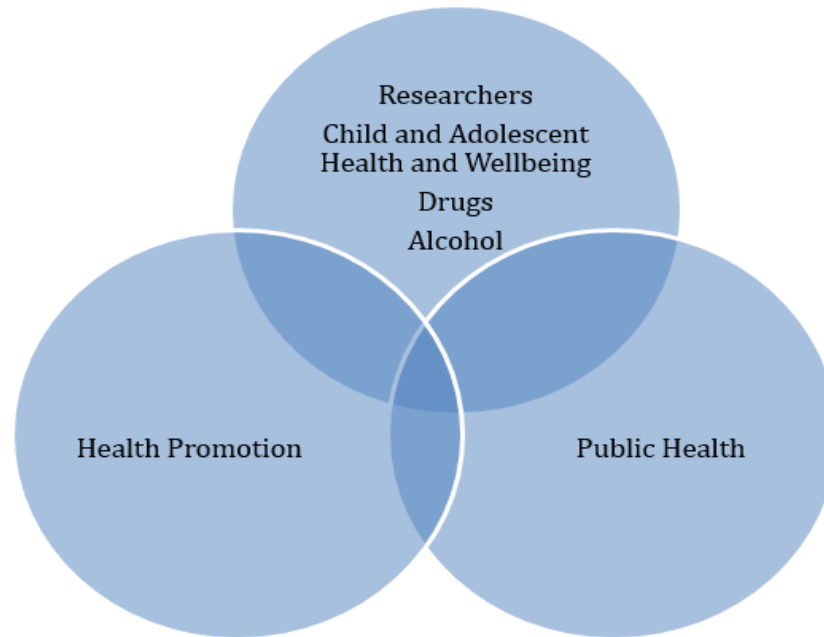
Interview guide researchers

Topic	Types of questions
Descriptive profile	Gender Research interests and academic level
Research-related impacts	Types of problems/knowledge research addressed /papers / citations/grant funding and collaborations /dissemination
Policy impacts	Levels of impact; sub-national, national, international; nature of impact, conceptual/instrumental
Service impacts	Impact on health or public service i.e. workplace health, road safety – evidence-based practice guidelines
Societal impacts	Changes in knowledge and attitudes about health behaviours
Research evidence	Kinds of evidence ministers/policy makers find convincing/ how can it be improved/researchers help to improve the impact of evidence

The policy makers

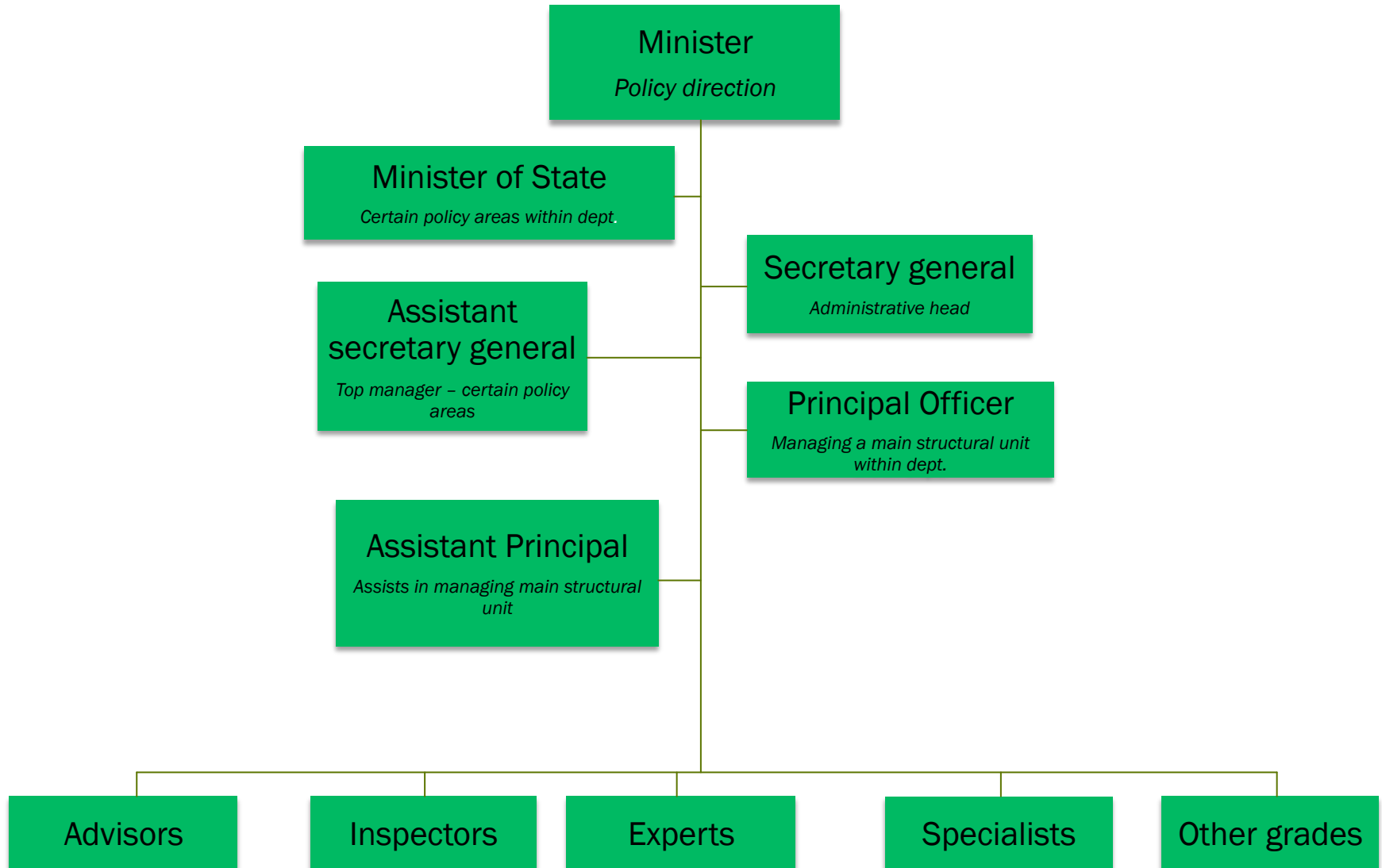
- 3 Government Departments: Mid – senior level civil servants
- Number of years experience 12 – 37 years, mean 23 yrs
- Educational background
 - 3 = PhD
 - 1 = completing PhD
 - 1 = Masters
 - 2 = Bachelor of Arts
 - 1 = Leaving Certificate

The researchers



Professorial level = 3
Senior researcher = 5

The policy makers



The policy makers

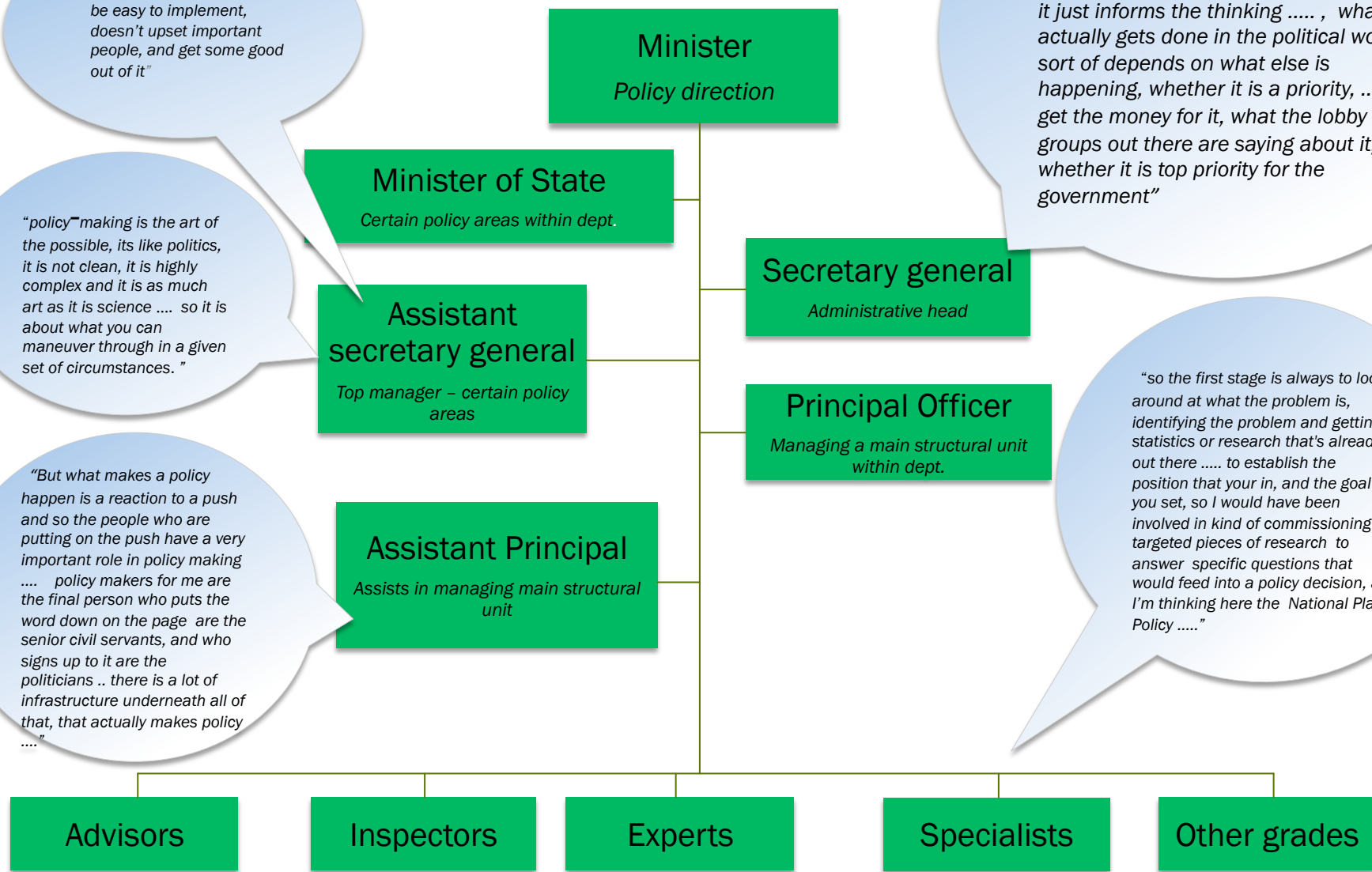
" .. policy you know has to be easy to implement, doesn't upset important people, and get some good out of it"

"policy-making is the art of the possible, its like politics, it is not clean, it is highly complex and it is as much art as it is science so it is about what you can maneuver through in a given set of circumstances."

"But what makes a policy happen is a reaction to a push and so the people who are putting on the push have a very important role in policy making policy makers for me are the final person who puts the word down on the page are the senior civil servants, and who signs up to it are the politicians .. there is a lot of infrastructure underneath all of that, that actually makes policy"

" well I mean you never get a situation where, you would have a piece of research that gets accepted and gets implemented,, it just does not run like that, what the research would do is it just informs the thinking , what actually gets done in the political world sort of depends on what else is happening, whether it is a priority, .. can get the money for it, what the lobby groups out there are saying about it, .. whether it is top priority for the government"

"so the first stage is always to look around at what the problem is, identifying the problem and getting statistics or research that's already out there to establish the position that your in, and the goal you set, so I would have been involved in kind of commissioning targeted pieces of research to answer specific questions that would feed into a policy decision, am I'm thinking here the National Play Policy"



Advisors

Inspectors

Experts

Specialists

Other grades

Types of research evidence preferred

Policy makers

- *“Scientific evidence – evidence that is irrefutable”*
- Quantitative data – can make inferences, say whether it is representative or not
- Evidence that comes in front of them – *“one of my biggest critique of researchers and the academic space and I say this with full respect is I think they invest very little on dissemination and communicating their key messages”*

Researchers

- Clear, concise accessible information
- Number crunching – quantitative information
- Constituencies preferences – focus groups
- Personal stories – politicians more interested in stories than statistics – anecdotal evidence

Views of researchers: how the evidence can be improved

- *Bullet points – “charts that are very clear, something that policy makers can look at and make sense out of it, without spending more than 10 minutes”*
- *Quasi economic data – “the statistics that have had the biggest impact are the ones showing the impact on the health services, or the bed days used ... horrific stories of large numbers of homicides and suicides doesn’t impact usually ..”*
- *Evidence from multiple sources – “approaches .. a question or an issue from a number of different angles,”*
- *Building relationships – “asking the .. policy makers directly what format would you like it in ... they want a paragraph, they want something they can use in a parliamentary question” - HBSC Fact sheets with full sentences*

Views of researchers: how the evidence can be improved

- Timing – *“some people don’t really want to do media stuff or advocacy ... it does need to be done and if it is informed by research it helps, but it is not sufficient .. you need timing”* Kingdons policy stream model (Kingdon, 1995)
- Communication – *“I think the policy makers need to listen to the ... evidence and not just think about what would please their political masters at times... be prepared to put that evidence to their Ministers and not filtering it too much”*
- Technical expert – *“the model they have in Canada is that they do bring in experts to different sections in Government to blend .. as a mix ..you have both experts and you have civil servants both working together”*

Views of policy makers: How the uptake of research evidence can be improved

- *Methodology – “people have no idea just how difficult it is, ... so strong factual, qualitative evidence .. focus is on quantitative evidence, my own sense is that the systems needs to move towards a much more nuanced sophisticated view on qualitative evidence”*
- *Context – “what is the real message and that is not often clear, you get a piece of research the conclusions and recommendations are often written in a day where the rest of the research takes a year ... what is possible and feasible in the context in which this piece of research is going to land”*
- *Respect – “it is about making the evidence accessible to people who are not researchers, and at the same time making sure the actual evidence is there, so I have seen this happening where a researcher was asked to present the findings from a piece of research that had been commissioned and for to make it accessible for policy makers, and basically he just removed all the references, like that is really disrespectful of the policy making community”*

Summary

This study explored the views of researchers and policy makers on the use of research evidence in policy making. It found that the policy making process is very complex and there are many factors other than the research evidence that has an impact on policy. The evidence that had the most influence on ministers and senior civil servants was strong factual quantitative evidence. Increasing the uptake of research evidence by policy makers could be improved by researchers producing clear, concise, relevant and timely research.

Thank you for listening