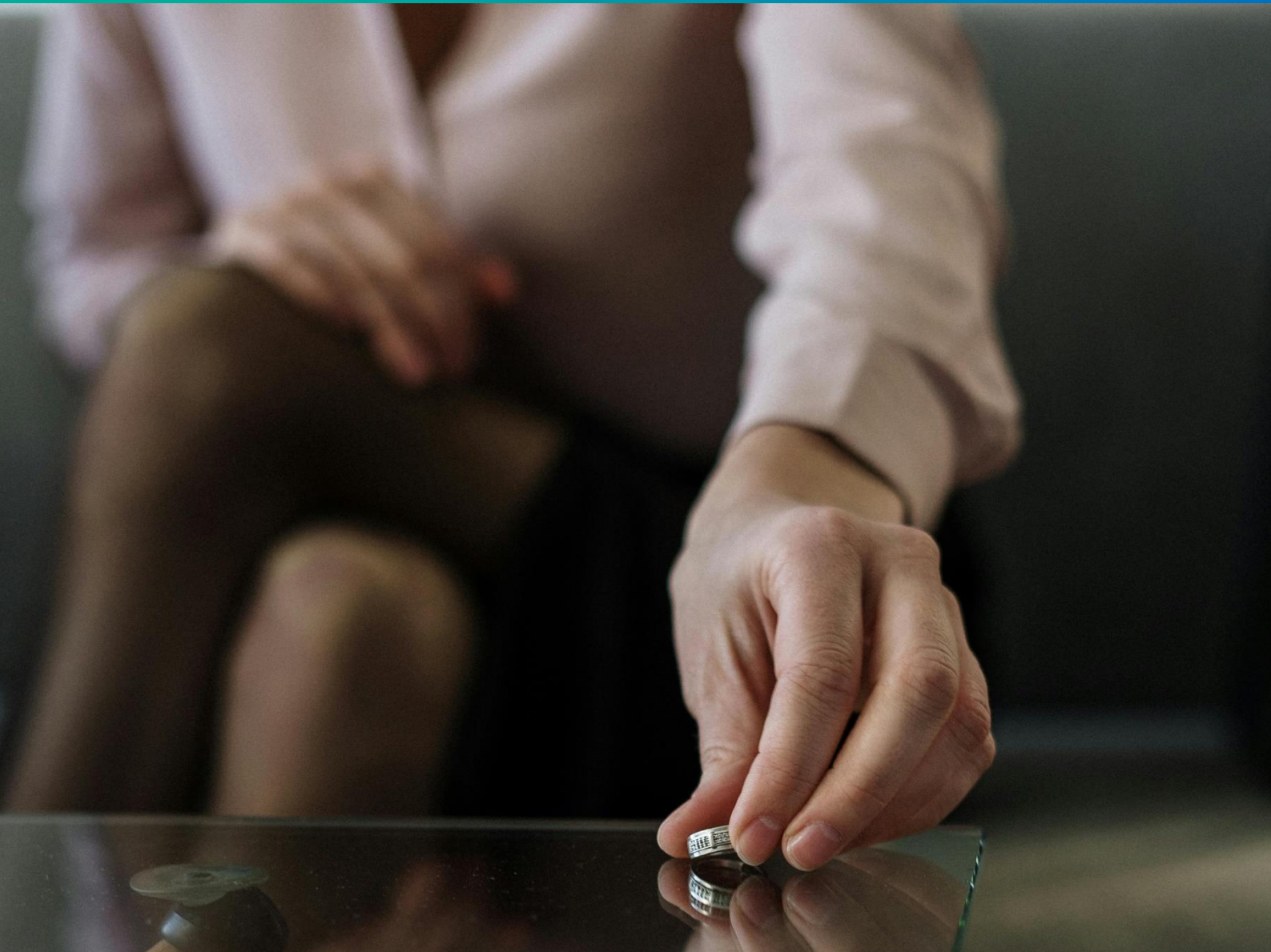




REGIOPLAN

PARTNER VOOR MAATSCHAPPELIJKE IMPACT



Evaluatie DigiPlein



Evaluation DigiPlein

SUMMARY

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Summary



Management summary

Background

Between 2018 and 2022 the Divorce Without Damage Programme was carried out. The focus of this programme was to prevent damage caused to children when their parents separate. In the context of this programme DigiPlein was developed. DigiPlein is an online environment where parents, children and professionals can easily access neutral information and support around divorce. The aim of this information provision is to contribute to the de-escalation of conflicts during divorces and the prevention of acrimonious divorce proceedings. In April 2023, DigiPlein went online in the form of a website: www.uitelkaarmetkinderen.nl.

Objective and research questions

The aim of this study is map out how DigiPlein is functioning and to identify possible improvement points for the future.

The following **research questions** have been formulated for this study:

Plan evaluation	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. What was the purpose of DigiPlein and how does the design of the DigiPlein match it?2. What is known from (international) scientific literature (evidence-based) about:<ol style="list-style-type: none">a. the contribution that (certain) online information and education can/can't make to a smooth divorce process or the prevention/resolution/de-escalation of problems and acrimonious divorce proceedings?b. the way relevant information can best be communicated to (various types) of divorcing parents and professionals?3. Does the chosen format (website) and type of information on the website match these scientific insights?
Product evaluation	<ol style="list-style-type: none">4. What is the information need of the total, potential target group of DigiPlein?5. How do visitors experience DigiPlein website?
Overarching	<ol style="list-style-type: none">6. What conclusions can be drawn (per target group) about:<ol style="list-style-type: none">a. the suitability of a 'website' for the intended (policy) objectives and possible alternatives;b. the matching of the website content to the need(s) of the target groups;c. the functionality of the website;d. possible improvement points regarding the website?

Research method

For this evaluation the method of *Realistic Evaluation* was used. First of all, this involves identifying the underlying policy theory and testing the working mechanisms of that policy theory against scientific literature. This is followed by data collection on the operation of these mechanisms in practice.

In the context of this evaluation the following research activities have been conducted:

- **Plan evaluation:** reconstruction of the policy theory of DigiPlein based on a document study and interviews with stakeholders involved in the development stage of DigiPlein; testing the scientific basis of the policy theory by means of a brief literature study, and a brief website analysis.
- **Product evaluation:** qualitative study by means of interviews with parents (n=9, including two low-literate parents) and professionals (n=8); quantitative study by means of online questionnaires among parents (n=311) and professionals (n=70).
- **Integrating the plan and product evaluation:** the results of the plan evaluation and the product evaluation have been integrated by the researchers in an integration session, in order to answer the overarching research question.

Results of the plan evaluation (chapter 2)

Starting point for the reconstruction of the policy theory are the **policy and website objectives**. The overarching policy objective (intended impact) DigiPlein should contribute to, *is the prevention of damage caused to children when their parents separate, by preventing conflicts and legal battles as much as possible*. The DigiPlein is expected to contribute to this through the website objectives. For parents, these are:

1. *Giving parents information in an early stage that will help them manage matters surrounding their divorce on their own;*
2. *Reducing the stress parents experience by means of de-escalation and the prevention of acrimonious divorce proceedings;*
3. *Empowering parents to approach the right professionals with clearer expectations and requests for help.*

The website objective for professionals is: *'To provide overview and role clarity to professionals so they can better guide and support parents'*.

The policy theory behind DigiPlein has three **core mechanisms** (intermediate objectives):

- **Broad and timely reach:** broad in the sense that DigiPlein should reach a sufficient number of parents and professionals. Timely means that parents already arrive at DigiPlein when the wish to as soon as the desire for divorce arises in them, allowing them to be signposted to the help and support available at an early stage of separation. With regard to professionals, timely reach serves to enable them to better help parents.
- **Content:** the website offers a complete and reliable overview of information enabling parents to self-help or referral to appropriate help, with regard to varying issues. A complete and reliable overview of information enables professionals to tailor the help they offer to parents and to refer them if necessary.
- **Design/structure:** a clear structure of DigiPlein contributes to a better overview among parents and professionals. Precisely because of the multitude of information that providing a complete overview requires, this clear structure is very important to guide parents and professionals towards the right information. This makes DigiPlein more attractive to parents and professionals, which stimulates use of the website.

Finally, the policy theory identifies a number of **contextual factors** that influence the operation of these mechanisms. On the one hand there are target group specific contextual factors (the divorce as an unsettling life event, differences within the target group of parents, multi problems in the family, (for professionals) the phase in which the professional is consulted). On the other hand there are societal contextual factors (the housing situation in times of housing shortages, trust in the government).

Insights from scientific literature

The policy theory was tested against insights from the scientific literature. It appears from the literature that online information should pay attention to the following topics in order to be effective:

- Information on co-parenting;
- Information on organising practical affairs;
- Information on emotional support;
- Information with attention to specific circumstances (for instance: domestic violence).

The way information is presented to parents should be sufficiently stress-sensitive, by which is meant above all: easily accessible. The literature points to concrete language, B1 language level and a clear structure. Finally, the literature points to aspects that can promote reaching a broad target group. These include offering information in the mother tongue at B1 level (and thus offering information in several languages) and information on specific circumstances. For professionals, information on stress-sensitive communication is important. This primarily involves making professionals aware of the impact of stress on parents in this situation and also giving them tools to work stress-sensitively.

Alignment of DigiPlein with scientific insights

In terms of form and information offered, DigiPlein is largely in line with these scientific insights (e.g. in terms of B1 language level and the use of drop-down menus, to promote text structure). One insight DigiPlein does not yet match is that information in the mother tongue is most effective: currently, DigiPlein offers information exclusively in Dutch.

With regard to its content, DigiPlein is also in line with scientific insights. The DigiPlein offers a large amount of information on themes that are important according to the literature. On two themes, this is much less the case: information that focuses on specific circumstances parents may experience and information on stress-sensitive communication for professionals who work with parents.

Based on the literature studied, it cannot be determined whether the form (a website) is in line with the scientific insights.

Results product evaluation (chapter 3)

The findings of the qualitative and the quantitative study on how DigiPlein is functioning in practice are described below.

Information needs/desires, expectations and interests of parents

Parents who (want to) divorce, have varying information needs: they need information on practical matters (for instance financial and legal matters), on how to deal with the children during the divorce and on dealing with their own emotions. Parents expect to find information on DigiPlein mainly on the first two topics. With regard to all these themes parents are in need of concise and well-organised information, for instance in the form of lists or practical tips and tools. Parents also have a clear need for information they can find online.

The information needs of professionals are usually very specific. Professionals mainly search for information about psycho-education to reduce stress in parents; for themselves, professionals need information on culture-specific divorce processes and information on available support in the region where they work. Professionals seek all this information partly online, however, online information is a less primary source of information for them than for parents: internal information sources of the organisation for which they work, such as internal trainings, are their most important information sources.

With regard to expectations of DigiPlein, it turns out that parents mainly expect to find information on how to arrange practical matters on the website and on how to deal with the children during the divorce. Parents also have a strong need for information on emotional support for themselves but expect to find this to a lesser extent on DigiPlein. Professionals generally expect less often that they will find the information they are looking for on DigiPlein.

Based on the study little can be said about which types of parents and professionals are or are not interested in DigiPlein. Among both parents and professionals, there is some familiarity with DigiPlein (although this does not equate to use of DigiPlein). There is also a significant proportion who do not know the website at all.

Experiences with DigiPlein

The DigiPlein mainly responds well to the information needs of parents who have visited the website. Parents judge the helpfulness, completeness, reliability and comprehensibility of DigiPlein predominantly positively. However, the information could be presented more concisely: parents regularly label the texts on DigiPlein as 'too long'. The website is less responsive to the information needs of the professionals who visited DigiPlein. However, professionals are positive about the suitability of DigiPlein for parents.

The functionality of DigiPlein is predominantly positively assessed by both parents and professionals on website appearance and 'tone of voice' the latter of which is regarded as compassionate. The clarity of the website emerges as the most obvious point of criticism. Parents experience insufficient search convenience at DigiPlein, and both parents and professionals say they do not always find the arrangement of topics on DigiPlein logical.

With regard to the functionality for specific target groups of parents (such as parents with a mild mental disability, parents with a non-Western cultural background or parents with low literacy) the study provides a limited picture. However, the study does show signs that multilingual and visual information is very important to reach these target groups.

Integrating the plan and product evaluation (chapter 4)

Combining the findings of the plan and product evaluation shows that not all mechanisms to achieve the target reach are sufficiently implemented. For all website objectives, the same conclusion applies to the *reach* mechanism: DigiPlein does not yet sufficiently reach parents and professionals to achieve the website objectives. However, a website has the potential to be a suitable means to provide parents with information at an early stage: it matches their search behaviour. This seems to be less the case for professionals.

For the remaining mechanisms of the policy theory, the following can be said about the achievement of the website objectives:

For parents:

1. Giving parents information in an early stage that will help them manage matters surrounding their divorce on their own:
 - *Content:* DigiPlein has a varied information offer that matches the varying information needs and questions of parents. It also meets the clear need of parents of a reliable source of information. The study does show that this information needs to be presented in a more concise way.
 - *Structure:* the current structure of DigiPlein is not sufficiently clear. Due to the current arrangement of topics on the website parents cannot easily find the information they need to arrange matters concerning their divorce.
2. Reducing the stress parents experience by means of de-escalation and the prevention of acrimonious divorce proceedings:
 - *Content:* because the content of DigiPlein matches the questions of parents well, it may reduce the stress that parents experience when they are looking for information. Based on this study, it is not possible to determine to what extent unnecessary acrimonious divorce proceedings and escalation are prevented, but it is plausible that these problems occur less often when parents are better informed (the literature study also indicates that information on emotional support contributes to parents making better informed choices - including legal ones - from the outset, which they still support later on).
 - *Structure:* a clearer structure of DigiPlein would promote the achievement of this website objective: it would make the parents' search process on the website less stressful.

3. Empowering parents to approach the right professionals with clearer expectations and requests for help:
 - *Content and structure*: the extensive information on DigiPlein possibly helps parents reach the appropriate professionals with clearer expectations and requests for help, provided that this information is easier to find on the website. Based on this study, it cannot be determined whether and to what extent this is the case.

For professionals:

1. Providing overview and role clarity to professionals so they can better guide and support parents:
 - *Content and structure*: the information on DigiPlein does not match the specific information needs of professionals very well. With regard to offering an overview, professionals particularly seem to need more insight into region specific support, so they know precisely which other professionals they can involve within their region on behalf of the parents. Currently, DigiPlein does not offer such an overview. It appears that professionals mainly appreciate the added value of DigiPlein as a tool for parents which professionals may use to refer them to. Therefore, they mainly regard the clarity of structure of DigiPlein from the perspective of parents instead of from their own perspective.

Conclusion

The study shows that DigiPlein potentially contributes to the objective for parents: reaching parents at an early stage with suitable information and as a consequence preventing conflicts and legal battles between parents as much as possible, with the result of reducing damage caused to children when their parents separate.

However, as yet, this potential of DigiPlein is not sufficiently fulfilled. This is due to the following reasons:

1. The reach of the website is unsatisfactory, both because the website is insufficiently known among the target groups, and because online findability is not optimal.
2. The way the information is presented at the website insufficiently matches the conciseness and structural clarity parents need.

One of the objectives of DigiPlein is aimed at the target group of professionals (providing overview and role clarity to professionals so they can better guide and support parents). The website contributes to a much lesser extent to achieving this objective, both in practice and in potential.

Possible areas of improvement for DigiPlein

Important limitations of DigiPlein in its current form are the reach among the target group and the way the information is presented. This results in the following points for improvement:

- Limit DigiPlein to the target group of parents but use professionals to increase the reach among this target group. In addition, carry the activities through that have already been taken with regard to the findability of the website on the Internet. Increase the findability of the website by means of search engines and government organisations, healthcare networks and social institutions. Usually, Google is the first place where people start searching, so if the website would stand out in the search results, this would increase its visibility.
- In order for professionals to be able to refer to the website awareness of the website among professionals should also increase. Use associations of professionals, conferences and other gatherings of professionals on the theme (complex) divorces and relevant online (e.g. at 1SociaalDomein.nl) and offline networks (e.g. attention officers domestic violence and child abuse) to inform professionals of the website and the information parents can find there.
- Find another way to meet the desire of professionals for more information on stress-sensitive communication with parents. To do so, connect with existing ways of and platforms for developing expertise.
- Investigate whether and how adapting the structure of the website would indeed lead to a better match with the search behaviour of parents. At the moment, this match has not actually been tested (through user experience research). It is important to test changes to the structure before implementing them. A possible improvement in this context which arises from this study, is to organise the information according to what parents need in the various phases of the divorce and, within these phases, to more thematically present the information.
- Keep the texts clear but concise. Make clever use of drop-down menus and internal links to unlock as much information as possible and to be as comprehensive as possible.
- With regard to certain target groups of parents a website like DigiPlein may be less suitable if they visit it on their own. This applies, for instance, to parents with a mild mental disability, parents with low literacy and parents that do not speak the Dutch language well enough. Therefore, with regard to this group, professionals are especially important as officials who can increase the reach and use of the website among this target group: after all, the infor-

mation on DigiPlein may be useful to these groups, provided that they can consult the website together with a professional. It is advisable to offer multilingual information on DigiPlein: this would enhance the functionality of DigiPlein for parents who are not fluent in Dutch.

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