

Summaries

Justitiële verkenningen (Judicial explorations) is published nine times a year by the Research and Documentation Centre of the Dutch Ministry of Justice in cooperation with Boom Juridische uitgevers. Each issue focuses on a central theme related to judicial policy. The section *Summaries* contains abstracts of the internationally most relevant articles of each issue. The central theme of this issue (nr. 8, 2005) is *Evaluation research*.

The importance of experimental evaluations in criminology

D.P. Farrington and B. Welsh

More convincingly than any other method, randomized experiments can establish the effect of an intervention on an outcome such as offending. This article reviews randomized experiments in criminology. The authors found 37 published experiments with at least 100 participants in 1957-81 and 85 experiments in 1982-2004. Noteworthy experiments in the two time periods are reviewed in more detail. While most of the earlier experiments produced non-significant findings, the later experiments showed that some interventions were effective (e.g. early developmental prevention, 'hot spots' policing, drug courts) and that others were ineffective (e.g. 'Scared Straight', boot camps and intensive supervision). Most experiments have been carried out in the United States. The authors recommend that other countries, including the Netherlands, should evaluate the effectiveness of criminological interventions using the 'gold standard' experimental design.

Evaluation of complex programmes; a theory driven approach

R. Pawson and C. Klein Haarhuis

In this article, the authors present an evaluation approach that is based on the premise that programmes are theories. Evaluating then becomes a process of testing programme theories. The 'theories-of-change' strategy helps to systematically put existing evidence together in order to reconstruct the 'inner workings' of a policy programme. This way, any failures in the programme can be identified and amended. The utility of this strategy is illustrated by the example of Megan's law, a sex offender notification programme in the United States.

Law enforcement and evaluation; a synthesis of 31 studies*C. Klein Haarhuis, M. van Ooyen-Houben, E. Kleemans and F. Leeuw*

In this article, the authors present the approach and findings of a research synthesis of 31 evaluations in the area of law enforcement conducted under the auspices of the Dutch Ministry of Justice. Two important findings are that (a) most of the enforcement interventions were not directed at natural persons or corporate actors as end-users of 'enforcement' activities, but on intermediary organizations in the government or in its vicinity; (b) the impact of the interventions was largely realized in terms of more production of output, like communication activities, number of criminal investigations etcetera rather than in terms of end effects.

Policies and causal effects; on randomized and natural experiments*H.D. Webbink*

Knowledge of the impact of policy interventions can yield high returns. However, estimating the impact of policy interventions is difficult because of selection of participants into treatment. Ignoring this selection may generate results that are seriously biased. Classical experiments with random assignment to a treatment and control group can solve this selection problem. In practice it can be difficult to realize this type of experiments. Many recent studies exploit so called natural experiments for identifying causal effects of policy interventions. Natural experiments are situations where the forces of nature or government policy have produced environments comparable to a randomised experiment. This paper reviews these new studies, the methods used and recent Dutch applications.

Evaluation research and integration policy*R. Bijl*

Evaluation research in the field of integration of ethnic minorities is gradually increasing. This article aims to stimulate the discussion on how evaluation research should be carried out, given the special characteristics of integration. The author discusses on which aspects of integration policies should aim at and how to assess these. Making proper policy evaluations will become easier because of the increasing availability of quantitative information on the position of ethnic minorities in Dutch society as well as increasing

possibilities to link existing registrations and other types of data of different organisations. Also the author stresses the importance of ex ante evaluations.

The role of evaluations in the budgetary process

A.L.M. de Jong and D.L. Kabel

Evaluation is vital to answers questions like: does the taxpayer get value for money? How can we learn from experiences and make policies more evidence-based in order to improve public sector performance? This article discusses the Dutch experience with evaluations from a broad perspective and presents the main elements of a new approach. In the Netherlands the number of policy evaluations has expanded enormously, but the quality lags behind. Improvement is needed on the following points: more effect evaluations; clearer policy objectives; a better guarantee of impartiality of the evaluations; and, improving the quality of the reporting. Furthermore, the general impression is that policy evaluations are potentially of great value, but that their current role in the policy process – with a few exceptions – is marginal. A strategy will be implemented to improve ex ante underpinning of policies, to refocus evaluations more on policy areas than on instruments and to stimulate impact analyses.