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Public Policies: An analysis from the evidence-based approach in Social Work

Políticas públicas: una mirada desde el enfoque basado en evidencia en trabajo social

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How to cite

Abstract

One of the answers to the ethic reference in Social Work is the Evidence Based Approach. However, its use is not limited to Social Work, in fact this approach supports a large proportion of decisions made at the policy level today. Through the public policies the State seeks the wellbeing of the population. Thus, it is important to show evidence about the implementation of such policies and how those meet their aims. At this point the proposed Evidence-Based Public Policy gains importance as a contemporary theoretical approach for Social Work, through its theoretical-critical analysis. The discourses and voices presented in this study are based on analysis of semi-structured interviews with social work professionals who have worked or are working with the approach.

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Resumen

Una de las respuestas al referente normativo en Trabajo Social es el Enfoque Basado en Evidencia. Sin embargo, su utilización no se limita a esta disciplina, de hecho, respalda gran parte de las decisiones que se toman en políticas públicas hoy en día. A través de las políticas públicas, el Estado busca constantemente el bienestar social, por lo que es importante dar cuenta de la manera y la medida en que las intervenciones estatales aseguran –o no- el cumplimiento de sus objetivos, relevando brechas a trabajar. En este punto cobra importancia la propuesta de Políticas Públicas Basadas en la Evidencia. En este artículo, se analiza críticamente esta perspectiva, relevando los límites y posibilidades para su transferencia en el contexto chileno, y relevando sus contribuciones como enfoque para el Trabajo Social contemporáneo. Las discusiones que aquí se plantean se basan en los análisis de entrevistas semi-estructuradas realizadas a profesionales del Trabajo Social con amplia experiencia de trabajo desde este enfoque conceptual.

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Evidence-based public policies

The essential purpose of policy is to promote and realize the welfare of all social groups. Its execution and its operational forms organize and administer public life through the regulation of the various relationships between humans and between humans and their environment (Henao, n.d., p. 2; Fedorowicz and Aron, 2021).

In this way, public policies are constituted as a form of State intervention, with the aim of seeking the welfare of the population in general. De esta forma las políticas públicas se constituyen como la forma de intervención del Estado, con la finalidad de buscar el bienestar para la población en general.

The main engine that guides political decisions are the ideologies and currents that constitute them, historically constructed, in addition to the availability of economic resources, congruent with respect to the cultural traditions from which they emerge, impacting values, interests, personalities, times, circumstances and events that happen at the time (Oliver et al., 2014; Banks, 2009; Bryman and Becker, 2012; Parkhurts, 2017; Cairney and Oliver, 2017; Mueller, 2019; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2020; Strydom et al., 2010; Fedorowicz and Aron, 2021).

The ongoing evaluation of the policy is a fundamental task (Henao, n.d.; Head, 2009; Sutcliffe and Court, 2006; Banks, 2009; Fedorowicz and Aron, 2021; Parkhurts, 2017) and is the key indicator of the fulfillment of its purpose; however, it is complex to quantify social welfare without falling into a reductionist view (Henao, n.d.; Oliver et al., 2014). Thus, the knowledge and use of available and generated information can contribute as decisive tools to reduce uncertainty about the results and impacts that could be generated (Henao, n.d., p. 3; Sutcliffe and Court, 2006; Banks, 2009; Bryman and Becker, 2012; Haskins and Baron, 2011; Cairney, 2016; Mueller, 2019; Strydom et al., 2010; Parkhurts, 2017).

Policies that have not been informed by good evidence and analysis are more likely to fall foul of uncertainties and unintended consequences, which can lead to costly mistakes (Banks, 2009; Bryman and Becker, 2012; French, 2019; Mueller, 2019; Oliver et al., 2014; Strydom et al., 2010; Parkhurts, 2017). However, this is not to say that policies without sufficient rigorous evidence cannot proceed, especially when they must be generated quickly (Haskins and Baron, 2011). Banks (2009) says that policies are experimentations and one can never be truly certain, but neither should one operate blindly, one needs a good rationale or theory that can be subjected to debate and scrutiny. At this point, evidence-based policy becomes important, which is constituted as an aspiration rather than an already consummated result (Head, 2009; Cairney, 2016; Oliver et al., 2014; Cairney and Oliver, 2017), since it is a proposal that still lacks a clear definition of its methodological scopes.

Head (2009) states that there are three key factors in the modern understanding of evidence-based policies. First, it must be based on high quality information on relevant topics. Second, that professionals have skills in data analysis and policy evaluation. And finally, policy incentives that encourage the use of evidence-based analysis and advice in decision-making processes.

It is key in this aspect to place scientific knowledge at the center of decisions, i.e., to place evidence obtained from systematic research at the center, based on the idea of rigor (Parkhurts, 2017; Fedorowicz and Aron, 2021). However, the authors emphasize that evidence is not the only influential factor in policy formulation, but that both individual factors specific to politicians, such as their judgment and experience, and others at the institutional level, such as incentives, should also be considered (Cairney, 2016; Mueller, 2019; Cairney and Oliver, 2017; Strydom et al., 2010; Fedorowicz and Aron, 2021; Oliver et al., 2014; Henao, n.d.; Sutcliffe and Court, 2006; Parkhurts, 2017).

Evidence-based policy refers to policies and programs informed by the best possible evidence, by making use of the available scientific evidence when formulating,

implementing and evaluating them (Cairney, 2016; Oliver et al., 2014; Strydom et al., 2010; Parkhurts, 2017; French, 2019). In this way it does not leave out the complexity inherent in policy. Evidence and analysis can play a useful and decisive role in informing policy makers, as well as conditioning the environment in which these decisions need to occur (Banks, 2009; Bryman and Becker, 2012; OECD, 2020; Fedorowicz and Aron, 2021; Parkhurts, 2017; Cairney and Oliver, 2017).

To date, there is no clear definition of evidence as it applies to public policy (Oliver et al., 2014; French, 2019; Cairney and Oliver, 2017; Fedorowicz and Aron, 2021; Strydom et al., 2010). Evidence is obtained from research defined as "any systematic effort to increase available knowledge" (Sutcliffe and Court, 2006, p. 2). Thus, it is intended to include all types of systematically obtained evidence, including action research, qualitative evidence, among others (Oliver et al., 2014; Sutcliffe and Court, 2006; Cairney and Oliver, 2017; Fedorowicz and Aron, 2021; Parkhurts, 2017; Saltelli and Gianpietro, 2017).

Governments often understand evidence as hard data or hierarchize types of evidence (Sutcliffe and Court, 2006; Head, 2009; Oliver et al., 2014; Saltelli and Gianpietro, 2017; Bryman and Becker, 2012; Fedorowicz and Aron, 2021; Parkhurts, 2017; French, 2019), following a technocratic logic of evidence. Head (2009) asserts that a bridge has been built between quantitative and qualitative evidence, yet program evaluation practitioners tend to use mixed methods. Governments and their central agencies, which apply the evidence-based approach as the basis for their interventions, recognize that qualitative studies are important as long as they are conducted rigorously and systematically (Oliver et al., 2014; Cairney and Oliver, 2017).

For a correct application of the evidence-based policy approach it is necessary to consider a wide range of research sources, and to move away from the more technocratic idea of evidence, in order to capture the complexity of public policy processes (Sutcliffe and Court, 2006; Oliver et al., 2014; Cairney and Oliver, 2017; Saltelli and Gianpietro, 2017; Fedorowicz and Aron, 2021; French, 2019), since as mentioned above, that would be falling into a narrow vision. Likewise, policies have different stages, cyclical, in which different types of evidence are required (Head, 2009; Sutcliffe and Court, 2006; Cairney, 2016), which could be mobilized according to mechanisms influenced by time, thus defining that for the agenda-setting stage, the evidence needed refers to elements of identification of the problem and its magnitude, accounting for the context, causes and scope, among other things (Sutcliffe and Court, 2006; Bryman and Becker, 2012; Fedorowicz and Aron, 2021).

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Second, for formulation, evidence is required to account for the different options and their implications, this from the various authors, relieving the different intervention alternatives with their possible consequences and economic and social costs (Sutcliffe and Court, 2006; Cohen and Martinez, n.d.; Grinell and Unrau, 2010; Parkhurts, 2017; Fedorowicz and Aron, 2021). During implementation it is relevant to obtain operational evidence to improve the effectiveness of the actions, since by surveying information on the process in its implementation it is possible to find errors that are causing poor or low performance, and thus be able to fix them, thus improving the intervention at a previous stage in which the damage can be stopped or solved more effectively, causing less negative impact or avoiding it (Sutcliffe and Court, 2006; Cohen and Martinez, n.d).

Finally, in the evaluation stage, evidence of impact and monitoring is required, which accounts for how the intervention was carried out, whether it met the expected objectives in terms of solving the problem and not making it worse (Sutcliffe and Court, 2006; Cohen and Martinez, n.d.; Fedorowicz and Aron, 2021; Haskins and Baron, 2011; Oliver et al., 2014). Banks (2009) states that in order to implement evidence-based policy it is necessary to have certain essential ingredients; first of all, it requires the right time and the right people, as for example, the case of the United Kingdom that began to use this approach finding the opportunity in the change of government from Thatcher to Blair, with which a rule that had been working in the same way for more than a decade was changed.

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Secondly, it is important to keep in mind that the methodology matters; many of the problems of policies have to do with the inability to identify the problem or that this identification has more to do with a desire of the government than with the problem itself (Banks, 2009; Head, 2009; Cairney and Oliver, 2017); in this way, general lines of a desired cost-benefit framework must be defined, in order to estimate the social benefit, considering the possible impacts. The key is to estimate whether the benefits would be greater than the costs within a coherent analytical framework, even taking into account that there are elements that cannot be quantified (Banks, 2009), this under a broad and not merely economic analysis logic, although it is considered as an element to be taken into account. In addition, good data are required as evidence (Banks, 2009; Haskins and Baron, 2011; Grinell and Unrau, 2010; Oliver et al., 2014).

Thirdly, transparency is needed, i.e., that studies and evaluations do not occur behind closed doors, as this is necessary to educate people and because to call it evidence it must be able to be challenged and tested (Fedorowicz and Aron, 2021; Strydom et al., 2010). In this aspect it becomes important that not only should experts be consulted, but also those impacted by the policy, which shows the government how

communities react to certain ideas and anticipates different courses of action to politicians (Banks, 2009; Head, 2009; Cairney and Oliver, 2017). Organizational support and sustained interaction between researchers and research users are needed, which can be achieved by encouraging the involvement of researchers early on, within or outside the formulation process (Sutcliffe and Court, 2006). In recent years, the idea of collaborative and shared research has been coined to overcome this limitation (Oliver et al., 2014; Cairney and Oliver, 2017; Fedorowicz and Aron, 2021).

Expertise and capacity are required, as you don't have good evidence without good researchers (Banks, 2009; Head, 2009; Grinell and Unrau, 2010; Fedorowicz and Aron, 2021). Sutcliffe and Court (2006) and Cairney and Oliver (2017) argue that communication and interaction between the research and policy worlds is needed to strengthen research and evidence use, which could be achieved by establishing incentives that facilitate evidence use by policymakers and/or by co-locating policymakers and researchers, and/or by enhancing staff exchanges between government departments and universities. Evidence shows that even when there is rigorously generated evidence, it is the values, ideologies and political agendas of governments that take precedence (Oliver et al., 2014; Cairney and Oliver, 2017; Mueller, 2019; Saltelli and Gianpietro, 2017; Fedorowicz and Aron, 2021). Finally, good evidence may be of low or no value if it is not available when needed (Strydom et al., 2010; Banks, 2009; Oliver et al., 2014). This approach requires a policy-making process that is responsive to evidence (Banks, 2009; Oliver et al., 2014), which could be facilitated through bridging the research and policy worlds (Sutcliffe and Court, 2006; Head, 2009; Bryman and Becker, 2012; Haskins and Baron, 2011; Oliver et al., 2014; Cairney and Oliver, 2017).

Methodology

The present study is non-experimental, descriptive, because the topic of study is not widely developed in the world and little developed in the national context of social work, so it is necessary that a methodology is able to capture and reconstruct meanings with flexible methods (Canales, 2006) and holistically (De la Torre et al., 2008; Taylor and Bogdan, 1987; Flores, 2009).

Interviews were developed, understood as "repeated face-to-face encounters between the researcher and the informants, encounters aimed at understanding the perspectives or situations as expressed in their own words" (Taylor and Bogdan, 1987, p.127). The interviews were conducted with experts in the Evidence-Based Approach (EBE) who have worked or are working from this perspective, for

which we resorted, due to accessibility criteria, to professionals from the University of Michigan, located in the U.S.A. A broad instrument was designed, capable of capturing the complexity of the object of study, since it responds to its own questions and codes, and therefore applies its own rules and speech (Canales, 2006).

The type of interview used was the semi-structured interview, which presents open questions and free answers for the interviewee, that is, without alternatives or stipulated response options. This technique is constituted as an orientation in the conversation (Canales, 2006), so that it allows in the course of this to go on revealing and asking questions that have not been considered, which due to the type of study and how little the phenomenon has been studied, becomes very relevant.

For the analysis, the process of codification and constant comparison of grounded theory was followed. Also ensuring theoretical saturation - defined as the non-emergence of new themes in the interviews, which was achieved after 8 interviews.

Possibilities and limits of evidence-based public policies

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The applicability of the approach to the social sciences, and to social work in general, has been subject to various problems that the applicators have been able to reveal. First, it is observed that the epistemological assumptions of the approach are still unclear (e.g. Henao and Jaimes, 2009 in Henao, n.d.; Oliver et al., 2014; Strydom et al., 2010), which is confirmed by what was revealed by the professionals, experts in EBE, interviewed for the purposes of this research, who state that there are differences in the understanding of the approach and how it is taught, which hinders its implementation (Interview 5). As an example, one interviewee states that there are social workers who say that the approach is distant from the professional context and that it is given only at the university (Interview 4). "I think there are different ways of understanding it because people have diverse training" (Interview 4).

Second, there are those who defend that evidence presents a hierarchy of quality based on the types of methodological rigor used to design and interpret studies. In particular the so-called Randomized controlled trial (RCT) approach (Head, 2009; Petticrew and Roberts, 2003), however, the application of this presents difficulties in politically or socially sensitive areas (e.g. Head, 2009; Petticrew and Roberts, 2003; Salteli and Ginpietro, 2017; Oliver et al., 2014; Cariney and Oliver, 2017) because of the difficulty of translating experimental and quasi-experimental results to large-scale programs and because of the tendency to minimize knowledge

of expertise in the field (Head, 2009). Politicians, scientists and policy makers may have different views about the type of evidence that is most reliable (Head, 2009).

It is worth mentioning that the approach originates from medicine, and that the idea of hierarchy of evidence is defended, socially, mainly from the area of public health (Petticrew and Roberts, 2003); however, the approach should not and cannot be transferred without prior contextualization.

Since the evidence used by physicians differs from that used by social workers and other disciplines, because the focus and the way of approaching the object from each discipline is different, in certain circumstances the proposed hierarchy of RCT at the apex and observations at the base can be inverted, as the hierarchical order also depends on the questions asked (Petticrew and Roberts, 2003). In this way, the levels of hierarchy are understood to be linked to the design of the study and not linked to the concept of evidence itself (Petticrew and Roberts, 2003). It is difficult to implement a hierarchy of evidence in other sectors of social intervention, unrelated or indirectly linked to health. This is affirmed by the interviewees, saying that it is suitable for clinical rather than community environments.

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> *There are few programs that work from an evidence-based approach, and they are mostly in clinical settings….. Medical contexts, focused on health behavior, and psychiatric institutions. In community contexts it is different, because they may say they do it, but there is no real application of the model. They don't really (…) adopt it (Interview 2).*

Thus, it is possible to observe that the characteristics of the evidence constitute a barrier to the implementation and use of EBE (Oliver et al., 2014). In addition, the approach must and is adapted to the different contexts in which it is used.

Science is only one input to evidence-based policy, as knowledge of the approach is varied. "The larger world of policy and program debate compromises several other types of knowledge and expertise that have legitimate voices in democratic society" (Head, 2009; Bryman and Becker, 2012), such as political strategy, through which the tactics and agendas of politicians and their organizations deliver a scenario of priorities and approaches, in addition to professional knowledge as crucial knowledge of roles in implementation and monitoring, and finally, both institutional sources and the experiential knowledge of those who receive the service. It thus follows that the evidence-based approach is not

only about evidence, but about integration of the best possible information, skills and values, considering the ecological context of the users-clients (e.g. Shlonsky and Stern, 2007; Bryman and Becker, 2012; Oliver et al., 2014; Cairney and Oliver, 2017; Fedorowicz and Aron, 2021). EBE ensures good work and impact, fed by available information and previous research, thus eliminating personal implications in decision making.

> *It leads to the delivery of better services, eliminating decisions made by intentions."* *(Interview 4)*

> *I think it is important because most of the theories have been tested and serve as guides for implementers and interveners (...). Otherwise social workers act based on their own opinions, which has the potential to do more harm than good. (Interview 1)*

Petticrew and Roberts (2003) state that the importance of the evidence and the method used will depend on the research question being pursued, which can be answered by different types of studies. Thus, the mixture of methods could be more relevant than just discarding qualitative methods, since the approach requires systematicity and rigor in the studies and research, which does not leave out the different methods by definition.

This conflict between methodologies is also highlighted by the professionals interviewed, stating that there are those who defend only qualitative methods and those who defend only quantitative methods, without reaching an agreement. "There are people who say that everything should be qualitative, others say that it is very quantitative and limited, and that quantitative should be" (Interview 4).

This is how researchers themselves can constitute a barrier to the implementation of EBE (Oliver et al., 2014; Cairney, 2016), making dialogue between methodologies impossible. Notwithstanding the above, and affirming the idea of not discarding qualitative methods, it is noted that the professionals interviewed point out that the mixture of methods can be more relevant than just one, in terms of the possibility of generating more and better evidence, and that qualitative and quantitative methods used rigorously can be at the same level and contribute to each other.

> *I think they go hand in hand, I don't think it should be one or the other or that one is good and the other is not. I think that the qualitative adds elements to the quantitative, which it is not able to capture in any other way. So if you do qualitative and quantitative research rigorously, it's a good mix. (Interview 4)*

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As Petticrew and Roberts (2003) state, the promotion of typologies is better than hierarchies in conceptualizing the strengths and weaknesses of different methods, considering the contribution of different types of research and that the method selected will depend on the research question rather than on a hierarchy.

> *The scientific exercise seeks to address (...) the complex relationships that mediate public life (...) and must take advantage of the multiple scientific methods to obtain relevant knowledge. Thus, the available scientific evidence would be enriched with the precision of statistical estimates and the representation of the ethnographic method (Henao, n.d., pp. 5).*

It should also be noted that social activity and science are linked, so that the latter is permeated by the prevailing ideology of each historical moment. In this line, Head (2009) states that while the prevailing ideology is neoliberal, individualism and economic growth, science will only benefit those who can pay for it. It will only benefit the dominant culture of the moment without responding to minorities (Interview 2).

Thus, there is a limit to the access of a few to evidence. However, in this scenario, a possibility opens up, since evidence can account for the gap between economic growth and the welfare of groups, becoming a tool that promotes a scientific state, in which decisions are based on evidence to promote welfare (Head, 2009).

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It is noteworthy at this point that the evidence-based approach achieved its expansion due to the idea of efficiency and effectiveness that it brings with it, related to the neoliberal ideology. However, it is also its cure, since the use of evidence allows the overcoming of economic domination, while continuing with the principles of effectiveness and efficiency, ensuring welfare.

As a possibility, it is worth mentioning that in the USA it is also used for the prioritization of programs to be financed, this based on the crises in which social programs and policies were the first to be cut, due to the neoliberal logic of the country. Evidence-Based Policies made it possible to show the social benefits and costs of programs and thereby ensure that social programs and policies that caused good impacts were not terminated (Haskins and Baron, 2011; Oliver et al., 2014; Strydom et al., 2010).

In this way, it allows for ending practices and interventions that do not provide good impacts, while consolidating old effective practices and generating new practices (Cairney, 2016), which is confirmed by the professionals interviewed.

Access to approaches that have helped to solve social problems effectively (…) will allow social workers to stop making interventions or actions that are not effective or that have not proven to be effective. (Interview 7)

At the same time, the use of evidence and demonstration of good impacts and interventions secure funding, which is noted in interviews with knowledgeable U.S. practitioners and implementers of EBE.

According to a study conducted by Oliver et al. (2014), the incidence, as a facilitator in the implementation of EBE, of having legal support and definition of clear lines for the use of evidence is low. Thus, Evidence-Based Policy can strengthen the possibilities of promoting and realizing well-being (Head, 2009; Cairney, 2016; Oliver et al., 2014; Saltelli and Giampietro, 2017; Parkhurts, 2017). Likewise, Henao (n.d) states that it is necessary to go to the background and overcome the current ideology in order to consolidate a fair and dignifying policy for all.

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In addition to this, the U.S. professionals interviewed state that it is an ethical imperative (Interview 6) and a professional obligation (Interview 4) to make known what has been done and to generate more knowledge, as well as to use it. This corresponds to what Shlonsky and Stern (2007) state, that at the very least, the aim is to be honest and respectful when trying to provide information to help people make informed decisions.

In addition to the above, political activity brings with it inherent limits, such as government priorities, ideological preferences, values and principles of politicians, government promises, personal interests (e.g. Head, 2009; Mueller, 2019; Oliver et al., 2014; Cairney and Oliver, 2017; Federowicz and Aron, 2017) among others, so the difference between formulators constitutes a barrier in the implementation of EBE (Oliver et al., 2014).

Despite the fact that the policy cycle has varied stages in which different evidence becomes important, not all policy areas are really open to rethinking, in addition to which one of the characteristics of complex social problems is that they are underlain by clashes of values that are sometimes not adequately recognized and addressed. Problems have different scales of complexity and these can generate differences in how problems are framed, debated and investigated (Head, 2009).

In this sense, it is possible that the Evidence-Based Approach is more likely to gain strength in areas that are further away from the political heat, since the political process is a web of arguments and persuasion, however, political adjustments and opportu-

nities for rethinking may arise in unexpected ways, as a response to incidents, conflicts or crises (Head, 2009; Federowicz and Aron, 2021). Moreover, policy analysis has a dual tendency, on the one hand to seek simple technical solutions, and on the other to identify value conflicts in order to generate dialogue, mediation and conflict reduction (Head, 2009; Saltelli and Giampietro, 2017; Federowicz and Aron, 2021). "Without ignoring the vast complexity of politics, scientific knowledge can provide it with crucial tools by decreasing uncertainty about its possible outcomes" (Henao, n.d., p. 2-3), and thus make more informed decisions to lessen the probability of, by intervening, generating more damage than the one intended to be repaired. It is claimed that good evidence can lessen and even neutralize political obstacles, and thereby make reforms more feasible (Banks, 2009; Saltellia and Giampietro, 2017; Federowicz and Aron, 2021).

The professionals interviewed repeatedly affirm that the use of EBE allows generating better interventions and impacts, which, they say, is affirmed by studies where they conclude that those who use EBE present better results than those who do not use it (Henao, n.d; Oliver et al, 2014; Federowicz and Aron, 2021).

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In addition to the above, there is a strong tension in governments regarding the use of evidence, because building the capacity to generate evidence can be expensive, since they do not always have the data and access to the necessary information (Banks, 2009; Oliver et al., 2014; Mueller, 2019), which may require a special study or the use of pilots from the same program (Banks, 2009), which requires an investment of time that for the government can slow down the process of generating policies. This is why constant evaluation constitutes a difficulty for governments (Banks, 2009); however, the policy must be constantly evaluated and supervised in order to correct the points and aspects that could lead to failure.

This difficulty of the governments is revealed, by the interviewees, as a difficulty of the agencies to implement the EBE. Since they do not always have access to the evidence, they also affirm that it prioritizes the intervention over the investigation and that with this they can have good interventions, but without knowing their effectiveness (Interview 5). It is also affirmed that through constant evaluation the information flows are improving, since what is delivered to the government from the different programs is made available by it to all the auditors or those who want to see it and study it. Los profesionales entrevistados afirman reiteradas veces que el uso del EBE permite generar mejores intervenciones e impactos, lo cual, dicen, está afirmado por estudios donde concluyen que quienes usan el EBE presentan mejores resultados que quienes no lo utilizan (Henao, s.f; Oliver et al, 2014; Federowicz y Aron, 2021).

> *We have to report the results to the government and the government is aggregating all this information, from all the programs across the country and they can see all over the country what is happening with young people and we can see if it is happening in the southwest or if it is happening in the northwest something is happening differently. (Interview 5)*

The lack of human resources is also observed, since there are no trained professionals (Oliver et al, 2014; Federowicz and Aron, 2021), which is confirmed by the interviewees (Interview 5). Added to this is the fact that those involved in policy processes do not always have the time available to complement daily tasks with research, due to the workload, and therefore the lack of time (Oliver et al., 2014; Shlonsky and Stern, 2007).

On the other hand, the transparency of programs can be politically risky, in the sense that governments do not want to be exposed to strong public criticism for programs or pilots with negative or weak impacts (Head, 2009). In this way, little or no transparency constitutes a barrier to the implementation of the EBE (Oliver et al, 2014; Federowicz and Aron, 2021). However, as Head (2009) states, the evaluation culture must be understood as a culture of constant learning, which is why it needs to be incorporated as a good practice. In this way the problem of lack of evidence and information could be eradicated. The concept of risk of the word evaluation would change, giving way to a concept of learning and continuous improvement, thus transparency becomes a facilitator of EBE implementation (Oliver et al., 2014)

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Haskins and Baron (2011) state that policymaking inevitably implies political, evidence and time constraints, however, this does not mean that evidence and information is not available or that authorities should not pay attention to existing evidence, or devote resources to get new. It is necessary to install a culture of evaluation as learning.

Politicians, through policies, intend to materialize social welfare, which is constituted as a complex task that requires high levels of ethical and intellectual commitment, so the availability of scientific knowledge that allows the fulfillment of this task must prevail. (Henao, s.f), rather than carrying out interventions of which there may be little or no knowledge of the impacts.

The Evidence Based Policy can help build a culture of evaluation through the use of two methods; the first, as a descriptive method to evaluate current policies, and the second, as the formulation of principles that allow the construction of an experimental approach for the production of new knowledge that serves as an input for

the construction of political decisions (Henao, s.f). It is possible to work in this line, making the knowledge developed up to now more transparent, and promoting the generation of new knowledge, which will advance the culture of evaluation as learning.

The foregoing is confirmed by the way in which the EBE is understood by the interviewees, who affirm that through evaluation, constant learning is achieved in the implication of research and the use of evidence in practice. As a possibility, the EBE is recognized as a facilitator of interdisciplinary dialogue, while through research common languages are achieved in the different disciplines, which, in turn, allows for raising the level of the social work profession.

With interdisciplinarity, it is possible to make better interventions, in the sense that social phenomena are holistic and are not the domain of a certain discipline, but that different disciplines converge in each phenomenon that, in their dialogue, allow broader and better informed interventions, in order to consider social phenomena and problems in their entirety and globality, and not from different aspects that do not dialogue with each other.

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Finally, knowing that the integration of the EBE between the curriculum and individual learning in the classroom is still in progress (Shlonsky and Stern, 2007), it is possible, from the academy, to strengthen the link between research and field work, since students continue to face places of practice and work that do not use the EBE, and that brings the possibility of working, discussing controversies and generating strategies to implement the EBE in their day to day life.

Conclusions

The objective of this study was to theoretically-critically analyze the applicability of Evidence-Based Public Policies, for which semi-structured interviews were carried out with 8 EBE experts. Based on the above, it is revealed that there are various limits and possibilities for the application of the EBE in public policies in Chile.

In the interviews carried out, it is clear that the access and existence of information is a point of conflict and a limitation of the approach; however, in Chile information has been generated that can serve as a basis for making better decisions and for implementing public policies based on evidence.

Limitations referring to the characteristics of policies and politicians, such as their interest and campaign promises, are also observed, as well as limitations refe-

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rring to the lack of resources, whether economic or human, due to the investment of time, economics and training. Finally, limitations related to definitions are observed, such as the epistemological framing of the approach and the way of understanding the evidence. However, depending on how the category of evidence is understood, there will be multiple figures that the EBE can acquire, which until now has been focused on an empiricist approach in its way of understanding (evidence).

This approach is considered as a tool that, understood in its breadth, could contribute to the accountability of the State's work and its evaluation, allowing the central body to establish a culture of evaluation that would be useful in other areas further removed from the policy. The EBE would contribute to the strengthening and appreciation of the profession, because better performance would be achieved, and from social work it would be possible to explore and access areas that until now have been left to other professions, due to lack of knowledge and necessary skills.

This study is not without limitations. The experts interviewed are experts residing in the State of Michigan in the USA. The convenience sample could introduce biases associated with the place of selection of the participants.

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