

Reflection or reaction: factoids, zombies and woozles

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Factoids

A piece of unreliable information believed to be true because of the way it is presented or repeated in print

Norman Mailer widely credited with coining it, in his 1973 biography of Marilyn Monroe.

Mailer said factoids were "facts which have no existence before appearing in a magazine or newspaper".... But nowadays they appear on people's lips, fingertips, ...



Social work education

Phillips, M (2008) 'The liberals who did so much to destroy the family must share the blame for Baby P', Daily Mail, 17 November

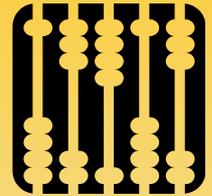


Image from BBC news

"Social work is plagued by low-calibre recruits, whose training is more akin to political indoctrination in political correctness, working in a culture which intimidates any dissent and turns morality and common sense inside out."

Factoid – troubled and troublesome families

‘We’ve always known that these families cost an extraordinary amount of money...but now we’ve come up the actual figures. Last year the state spent an estimated £9 billion on just 120,000 families.’ Eric Pickles



Ruth Levitas, Bristol University,
this **‘turns out to be a factoid – something that takes the form of a fact, but is not’**.

<http://www.poverty.ac.uk/sites/default/files/trouble Ahead.pdf>

Zombie Health & Care

Bit like Zombie economics
and Zombie politics...
ideas that won't lie down
and die



Zombie candidates?

- Lessons can be learned from Inquiries & Reviews...
- Attachment theory rules
- Anticipatory care for older people avoids hospital admissions
- Screening for dementia is beneficial
- All day centres are hopeless
- People need information...



Integration?

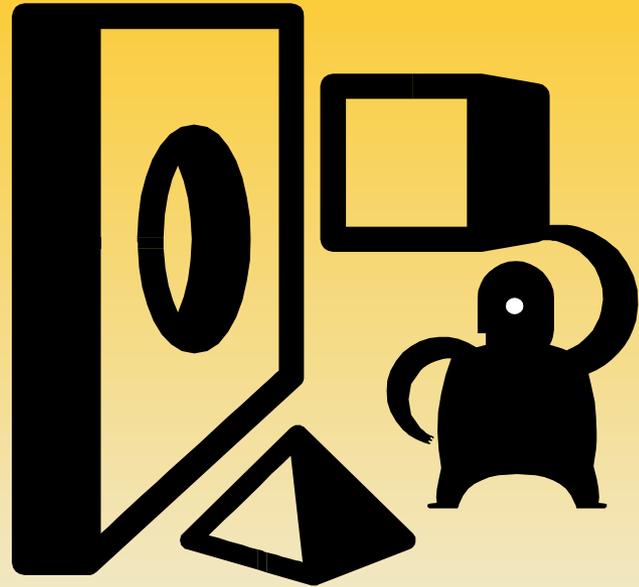
Integration of services will help meet the needs of an ageing society (and save money) (as long as we have...)

- Necessary ingredients for integration of services
- Close-knit professional networks
- Mutual sense of long-term obligation
- Little concern about reciprocation
- High degree of mutual trust
- Joint arrangements as core business

Glendenning C (2002) Breaking down barriers: integrating health & social care services for older people in England *Health Policy*, 65:139-151

Laws of integration

- You can integrate all of the services for some of the people, some of the services for all of the people, but you can't integrate all of the services for all of the people
- Integration costs before it pays
- Your integration is my fragmentation
- You cannot integrate a square peg and a round hole
- S/he who integrates calls the tune



Does all this matter in research?

Early Foundations

'... the real place where research is politically managed is in the selection of topics/areas to be researched and then in the detailed specification. It is there that they control the kinds of questions that are to be asked. This gives plenty of opportunity to avoid difficult results'.

Evaluation under contract: government pressure and the production of policy research
(Ed Page with LSE GV314 Group) *Public Administration* 2013



Inside View of potential for influence



Alex Stevens' account of his time in civil service

- 'The problem was not a lack of evidence, but the sheer quantity of data and opinions that was available. And most of it was unsuitable for answering policy questions.
- Policy-makers want to know what the costs and effects of a policy option will be, and on whom they will fall.
- It is rare for research to provide definitive answers to these questions. A colleague spoke of a "depressingly similar pattern" of looking for high-quality evidence, but then ending up with some anecdotes and "what you can garner through a few field visits".'

Stevens, A. (2011). Telling Policy Stories: An Ethnographic Study of the Use of Evidence in Policy-making in the UK. *Journal of Social Policy*, 40(2) 237-256.

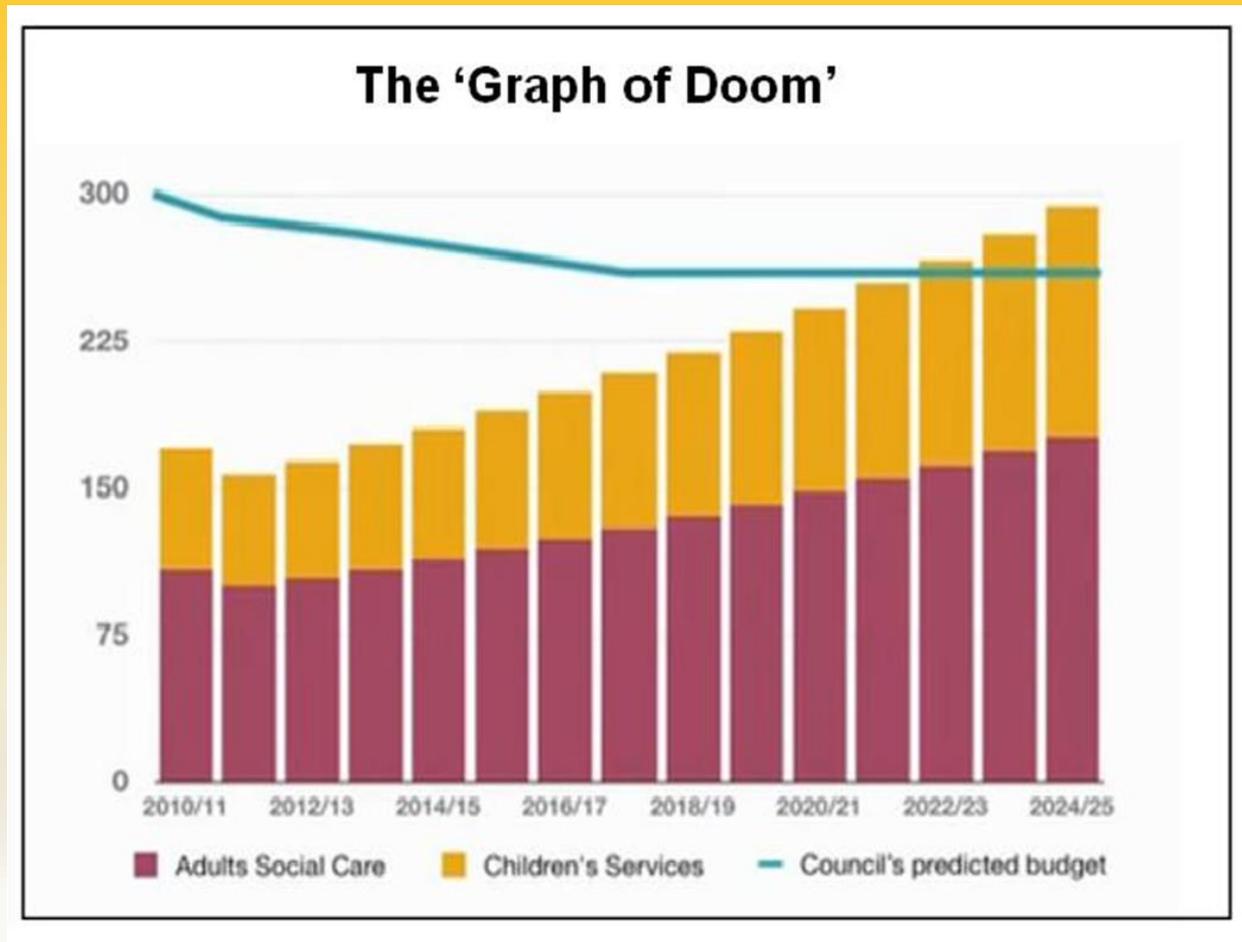
Killer Charts (from Stevens)

- Given that most of these tales were being told in the form of PowerPoint packs, the best way to increase their impact was to include “killer charts”. These graphs reduced the world to a usual maximum of two variables and they aimed to make policy implications self-evident. They excluded the possibility of uncertainty.
- Uncertainty – as my colleagues let me know whenever I tried to insert academic caveats – is the enemy of policy-making. - Stevens



Killer chart familiar to SSRG

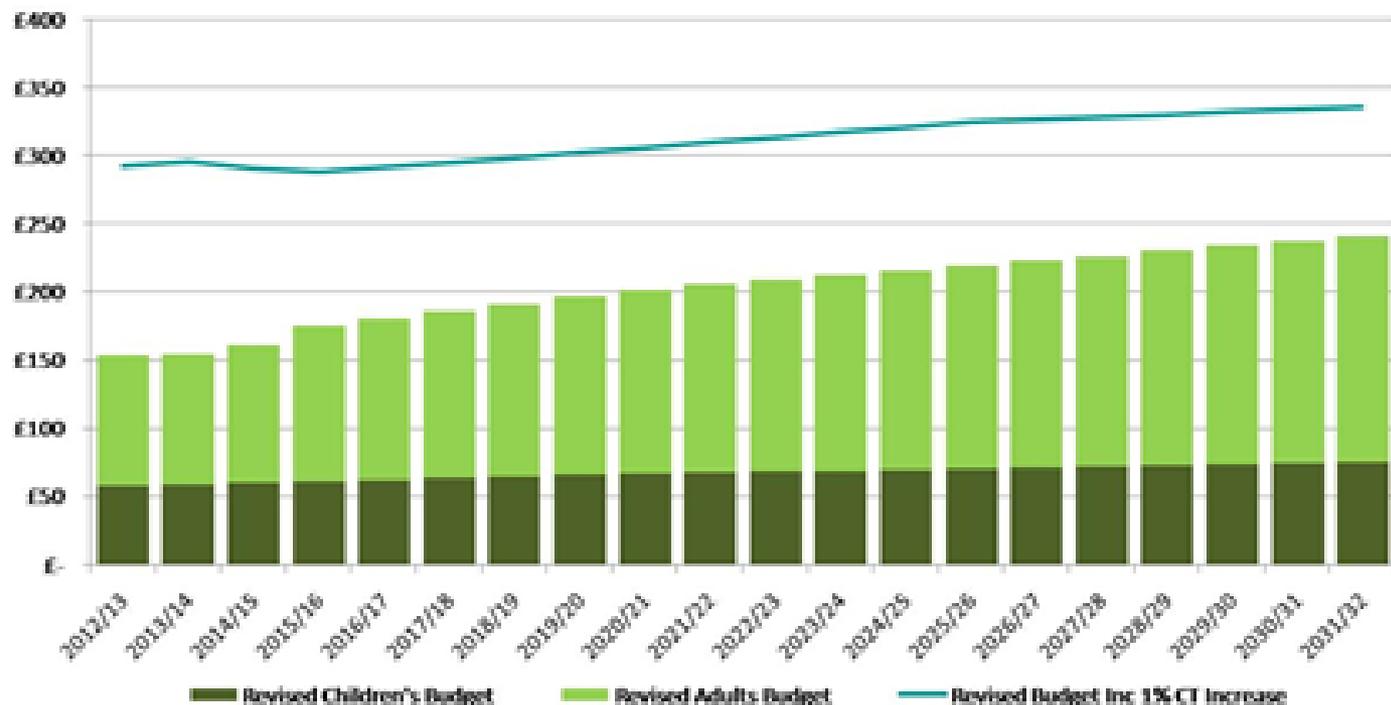
(my last sighting Jan 2014)



Counter killer chart

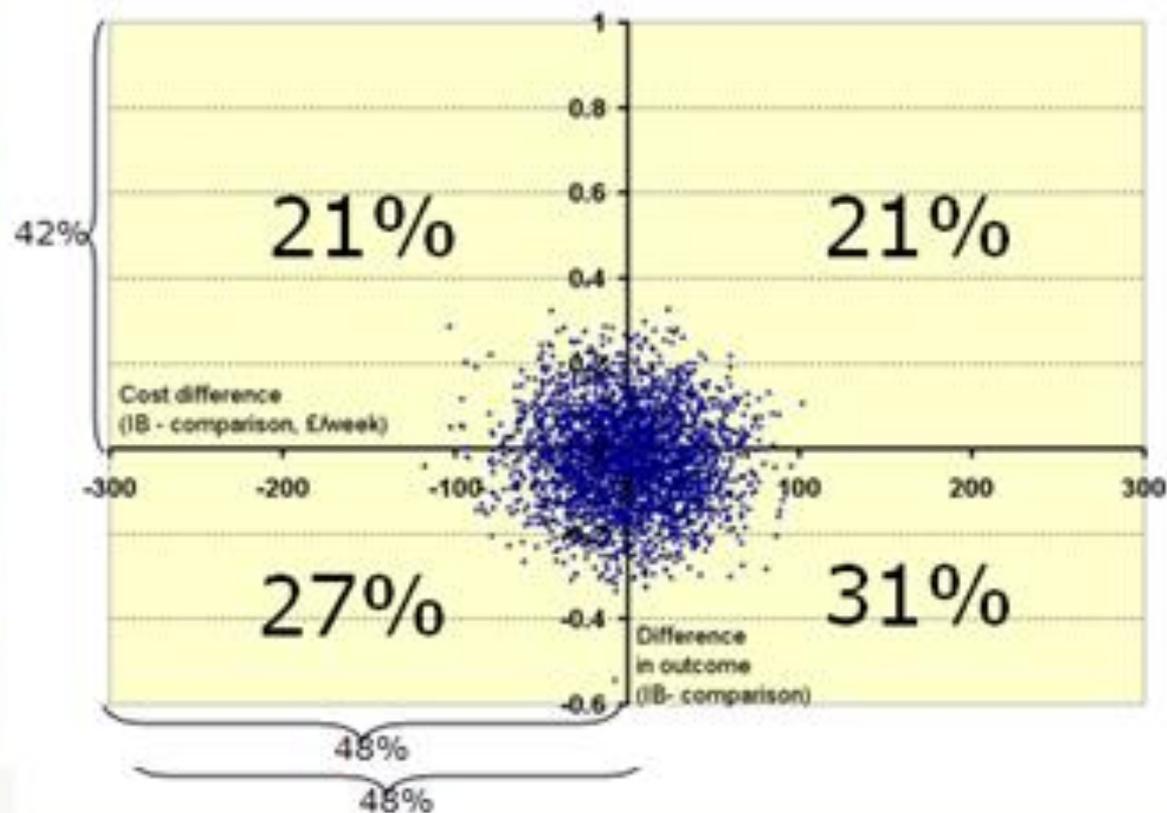
('Mr Reasonable' challenges the Barnet Graph of Doom)

Revised 'Graph of Choices' (Inc 1% Annual CT Increase) £million



Not so much a Killer Chart

Cost-effectiveness: social care
outcomes – older people



What is to be done – in current not abstract studies

UK Medical Research Council approach to complex interventions

- Conceptual modelling (can I see what to do?)
- Proof of concept, case study (can I do it?)
- Pilot studies (can others do it?)
- Rehearsal 'trial' (can it fit into an experiment?)
- Full scale comparative study (does it work?)
- Economic evaluation (is it cost-effective?)
- Implementation study (will it diffuse across the system?)

And finally

A woozle effect, or a woozle, occurs when frequent citation of previous publications that lack evidence mislead individuals, groups and the public into thinking or believing there is evidence, and non facts become urban myths and factoids

Manthorpe and Watson 2002 JAN editorial



Example? Food deserts in UK



What I've Learned

- Invest in early discussions –build impact in from start
- Be prepared to say that research is not needed
- Write it up in many places – inc social media
- Tell people what you have written
- Distil findings
- Use critical friends



In summary

- Knowing factoids and policy zombies
- Innovation is not our problem, evaluation is
- This is a good time to develop and test new ways of working
- And a good time to keep an organisational, professional and personal memory
- Last thought...What would we know if the internet disappeared?

Thank You



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The views expressed in this presentation are those of the authors, not necessarily those of the Department of Health