



PIBE: Information to support research and child welfare¹

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Psycho-social interventions with children and families in difficulty are numerous, varied and may be carried out over long periods. These interventions generate a large amount of data that is valuable not only to practitioners and managers, but also to members of the scientific community. For the past few years, Quebec's youth centres have been collecting information about services offered to their clientele using a shared, computerized information system called *Projet Intégrateur Jeunesse* (PIJ) or "Integrated Youth Project." Building on the PIJ data, *Plate-forme informationnelle sur le bien-être des enfants* (PIBE) or "Child Welfare Information Platform" makes use of this shared information system to support the development of knowledge in this field.

The PIBE project aims to ensure that the data collected by a sample of eight youth centres, in addition to informing and coordinating interventions, can also be compared over time between practitioners and centres and therefore useful to researchers.

PIBE relies on the collaboration of several clinical and research organizations concerned with children and youth in difficulty. The project brings together representatives from eight youth centres, the IRDS,² the Institut universitaire du Centre jeunesse de Québec, three research groups (GRAVE-ARDEC,³ GRIN⁴ and JEFET⁵), as well as members of Sogique⁶ who develop and maintain the PIJ system and database for Quebec's youth centres. The project also receives support from the Association des centres jeunesse du Québec.

PIBE results from the work of several stakeholders wishing to use the same computer application to facilitate the understanding of the life situations of young people in difficulty and to search for better ways to help them.

Using the same computer application across youth centres facilitates access to the clinical and administrative data for management and research purposes. Child welfare workers at the youth centres regularly enter into the PIJ database information about child maltreatment reports, assessments and orientation, referrals, the application of court measures, and case reviews. Under the PIBE project, eight youth centres collected additional data that could be used for scientific research. These data were collected in a way that neither the children nor their families can be identified. Under PIBE, data is entered in a rigorous and accurate manner and kept as up-to-date as possible.

Standardization to foster quality research

In order for the information to be used for research, it must be valid and reliable. Thus, the definitions and meaning of the data entered must be used consistently so that everyone is speaking the same language. To this end, the research team, in collaboration with the participating centres, developed a definitions guide to assist practitioners in entering the data. An extensive PIJ user awareness and training tour was conducted at the eight PIBE sites to help users become

The variables targeted by the project can be used to document children's characteristics (age, gender, family situation, language, nationality, cultural background, type of domicile, etc.), the primary and secondary problems reported (types of maltreatment or behaviour problems, specific clinical situations involved, abuser profile in cases of abuse, etc.), the characteristics of the intervention and the decisions made in each case (decisions on reports retained, court actions, additional assessments, referral to external resources, etc.).

familiar with these definitions. A training video was also produced for practitioners who could not attend the sessions offered. As well, the PIJ online help, available on all computer stations, has integrated the definitions guide to allow for quick consultation by practitioners. Finally, a validation protocol was applied to the data coming from each of the centres to evaluate the quality of the data and, if necessary, correct any information that was not properly entered.

PIBE: an operational research tool

By providing a window into the systemic processes and individual client characteristics, PIBE can be used to carry out various types of studies of interest to researchers, managers and practitioners alike. For example, data standardized under PIBE may be used to document:

- a profile of the clientele, their needs, the network of partners and youth centres, as well as the source of reports about child abuse and neglect;
- factors that influence child welfare case planning decisions;
- the evolution of the problems over time and according to place, as well as the identification of factors contributing to specific types of maltreatment;
- the impact of the interventions, services and programs for children and families at risk.

By 2008, the data related to the variables targeted by PIBE will be integrated into a large database by the Quebec Ministry of Health and Social Services, based on PIJ. In all likelihood, only at this time will it be possible to broaden access to this dataset to the broader research community.

Potential spin-offs

- more reliable information for researchers and practitioners, who can use this information for sound decision-making;
- better interventions, based on a solid understanding of the needs of client;

- better research and data analysis as well as more dialogue between the research and clinical fields;
- greater support for the development of child welfare programs and policies.

The PIBE project aims to develop the research aspect of this clinical information system by ensuring rigorous data through a process of definition standardization, controlling information validity and accuracy, and the sharing of tools for making use of the data.

Conclusion

The PIBE information platform is expected to provide researchers with broad and reliable data, while reducing the costs normally associated with the extensive research made possible by this dataset. Researchers will be able to carry out complex and diverse analyses in response to information needs expressed by managers and practitioners. In this way, the Child Welfare Information Platform (PIBE), in conjunction with the integrative youth project (PIJ), will enhance the knowledge base in the area of child and family welfare in Quebec.

1 This information sheet is based on the following peer-reviewed article: Lavergne, C., Clément, M.-E., & Cloutier, R. (in press). PIBE ou la création d'une fenêtre sur des données de recherche dans le domaine de la protection des enfants au Québec. *Intervention*.

2 Institut de recherche sur le développement social des jeunes (IRDS).

3 Groupe de recherche et d'action sur la victimisation des enfants et Alliance de recherche en développement des enfants dans leur communauté (GRAVE-ARDEC).

4 Groupe de recherche et d'intervention en négligence (GRIN).

5 Jeunes et Familles en transition (JEFET).

6 Société de Gestion Informatique (Sogique).

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Suggested citation: Lavergne, C., Clément, M.-E., & Labrecque, S. (2004). *PIBE: Information to support research and child welfare*. CECW Information Sheet #20E. Montreal, QC, Canada: Université de Montréal, École de service social and IRDS.

The Centre of Excellence for Child Welfare (CECW) is one of the Centres of Excellence for Children's Well-Being funded by Health Canada. The CECW is also funded by Canadian Institutes of Health Research and Bell Canada. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the official policy of the CECW's funders.



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