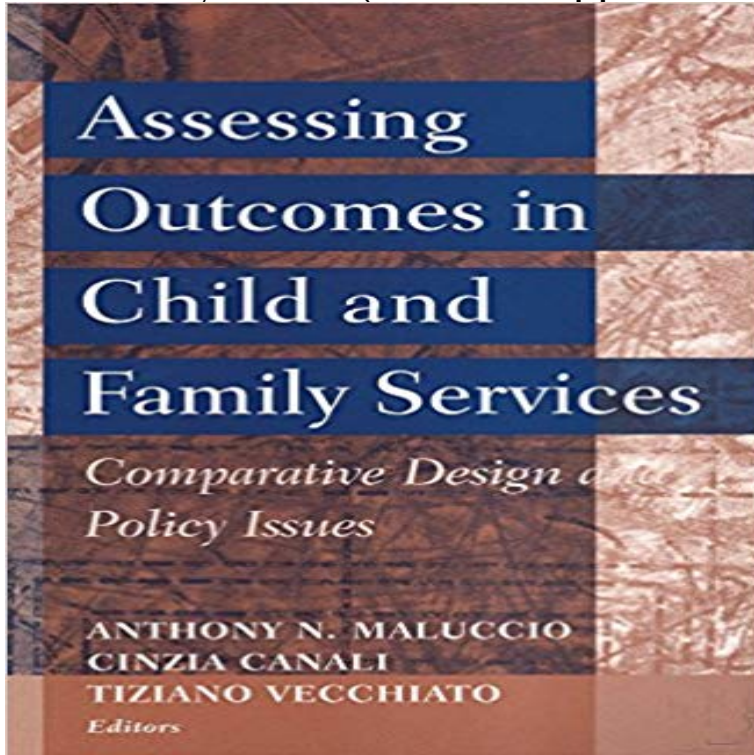


Assessing Outcomes in Child and Family Services: Comparative Design and Policy Issues (Modern Applications of Social Work)



In this collective portrait, editors and authors do not attempt to draw systematic, country-by-country comparisons. Given the magnitude of the issues, they believed that it would be inappropriate to paint with too broad a stroke. What they have accomplished, however, is to codify and identify what the participants repeatedly noted in regard to issues and difficulties inherent in conducting outcome evaluation. These include: varying definitions of outcome; complexities in measuring outcomes of particular interventions with different groups of consumers and documenting the effectiveness of the intervention; the tendency to focus on evaluation of process more than outcome; the challenge of involving practitioners in the evaluation task, in part because its value is unclear to them or perceived as distant or untrustworthy; the typical inadequacy of resources available for systematic evaluation; and the need to inject rigor into the design and execution of evaluation projects. The authors demonstrate strong conviction about sharing research expertise across national boundaries; learning through each other how to cope with organizational impediments to cross-national collaboration; and strengthening the interaction between practice and research. Their contributions suggest that there is wide interest in pursuing cross-national collaboration. In recent years, largely in response to demands by their funding sources for accountability, assessment of performance, and cost effectiveness, researchers in human services have been devoting increased attention to outcome evaluation. Limited attention, however, has been given to the findings of evaluation studies conducted in different countries. The present volume has been organized and edited to address the task of learning from outcome research across the world. Its goal, an extension of a major goal of the

human services in any one country, is to improve life chances of vulnerable children and youth.

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