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Learning from research partnerships internationally –
workshop report

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Date:	Thursday, 02 May 2024
Time:	14:00-16:30 GMT
Location:	Online (Microsoft Teams)
Programme:	14:00-14:10 Introduction: welcome and aims 14:10-14:40 Translational criminology 14:40-16:30 Restorative circle on international research partnerships

1. Introduction

The purpose of the Criminal justice Open Research Dialogue (CORD) Partnership is to support positive social change by embedding a culture of interdisciplinary open research in criminal justice in Ireland. Funded by the National Open Research Forum (NORF), the CORD Partnership organised three workshops in 2024 to facilitate partners to determine collectively the best ways of achieving this goal. In May 2024, the CORD Partnership hosted the second workshop, *Learning from Research Partnerships Internationally*, which aimed to explore the organisation and operations of large research partnerships in other countries, sectors and disciplines. Participants heard from international speakers involved in research partnerships. The workshop finished with a discussion in which attendees contributed ideas for actions that CORD might undertake to translate criminological research into policy and practice in Ireland, make change happen, and sustain itself beyond its initial funding period.

2. Translational criminology

Dr. George Pesta (Director of the Center for Criminology and Public Policy Research, College of Criminology and Criminal Justice, Florida State University) presented on translational criminology.

He defined the concept of translational criminology and shared the lessons learned from his recent research on researcher-practitioner partnerships in which he was involved.

Translational criminology, as defined by Pesta, is concerned with how knowledge is created through scientific research and used to inform policy and practice in criminal justice. Traditionally, research is conducted to inform theory and published in peer-reviewed academic journals, but we do not often take that final step to implementing it, or at least use the findings to inform, policies and practices in the criminal justice system. Pesta outlined a gap between what is known from research on criminology and criminal justice and what is implemented in policy or practice. Policymakers, practitioners and researchers typically operate in different domains; they are trained differently, incentivised differently, and have different goals. In the U.S. context, criminal justice policy is too often driven by public opinion, mass media, ideology and politics. Governments tend to enact policies and practices underpinned by these factors, not by scientific evidence. The potential of translational criminology lies in closing this gap.

When reflecting on his experiences of working in partnerships and researching translational criminology, Pesta argued that the three most important elements to break down barriers and form a successful partnership between researchers, practitioners and policymakers were relationships, trust, and reciprocity. It can take time to establish relationships and trust across a partnership, and to build understanding between the individuals and/or organisations involved. Relationships can allow partnerships to form multi-organisation, interdisciplinary connections and open communication practices to establish the wants, needs, limitations and constraints of those involved.

Open communication practices in particular are fundamental to reciprocity. Partners need to see and trust that research and evaluation can inform practice and policy, that it is information they can use, and that it can serve a diagnostic function to inform services. Pesta found from his research and experience that partners want information from research and evaluation practices to inform decisions around efficiency, resource allocation and the chances of programme success. It fosters trust among and between the partners that the data they share will be used responsibly to conduct quality research that will help them improve their services. Moreover, positive relationships and open communication practices among and between the partners can facilitate both sustainability of the partnership, and a recognition of 'windows of opportunity'. Pesta provided the examples of identifying policy champions across organisations and building relationships between identified champions across the partnership. The Center for Criminology and Public Policy Research try to help partners develop their own internal research capacities. The more partners examine data, openly communicate and seek opportunities to work together, the more opportunities there will be for collaboration and inclusive research practices.

Several challenges and benefits were outlined by Pesta in relation to working with and within partnerships. It is rare that the research findings would be implemented fully or exactly as advised. Rather, in an 'evidence-informed' approach, negotiations are inevitable. Ideally, research partners should be involved from the beginning to help identify and frame the problem and research questions. Being brought in at the later stages of a project leads to challenges with what is changeable and malleable in a policy/programme/practice that has already been established. Involving research partners from the inception of a project allows for the right issues/populations to be targeted to identify the solutions or interventions most likely to affect positive change. Moreover, while acknowledged as something particularly difficult, it is possible that early researcher involvement can prevent repeating mistakes and recycling ideas discredited in the existing research.

Other notable benefits include the level of data access that partners can gain and may not be possible in the absence of a partnership. Relatedly, improved information and communication practices between researchers, practitioners and policymakers not only increases trust in each other to source and use information, but broadens the information pool, allows for greater cross-disciplinary networking, and encourages engagement with more varied information sources and events outside one's own organisation.

3. Restorative circle: learning from research partnerships internationally

Speakers:

- Prof. Liz Aston, Professor of Criminology, Edinburgh Napier University and Director, Scottish Institute for Policing Research
- Amanda Coulthard, Head of Strategy and Performance, Scottish Policing Authority
- Prof. Adam Crawford, Chair in Policing and Social Justice, York Law School, University of York and Co-Director, ESRC Vulnerability and Policing Futures Research Centre
- Dr. Ioanna Grypari, Technical Project Manager for Science Policy and Innovation, OpenAIRE and Athena Research Center
- Dr. Lauren Supplee, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Planning, Research and Evaluation, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
- Chief Superintendent Ngaire Waine, Merseyside Police and Co-Director, N8PRP

3.1 What were the partnerships trying to achieve?

Speakers reflected on how the partnerships with which they were/are involved were trying to make a difference. By gaining insights from research and practice and focusing on issues in the public interest, partnerships can facilitate evidence-informed decision making with stakeholders on policies and practices that promote positive change for the social good. By being able to define problems and build a deeper knowledge-base, partners can develop new infrastructure, guidelines or services. True interdisciplinarity when translating research into policy and practice, however, is important. Emphasis should also be placed on enlisting and harnessing the knowledge of frontline practitioners and of those accessing services, to shape the partnership's research priorities, questions and outputs.

3.2 Tangible changes that research partnerships achieved

Speakers acknowledged that creating change takes time. Efficiently mainstreaming innovative work is a significant challenge. Nevertheless, speakers provided examples of change, including:

- Substantial changes to stop and search laws and practices as a result of a research evaluation and operational review with researchers across partner universities.
- A set of research projects resulted in a meaningful difference to operational engagement with 'unheard' communities, including children and asylum seekers, and to a better understanding of their experiences and perceptions of policing.

- Co-producing videos with partners, families and children enabled conversations around, and awareness of, online child sexual victimisation in a major U.K. city. This wide-ranging approach of working across services to address a problem that affects several organisations structured new ways of thinking about families, children and service providers in this area.
- A partnership seeking to address whether police recognise perpetrators of coercive control in intimate partner violence saw that existing mechanisms did not identify high risk behaviours. Changes were implemented to a new risk assessment that is better equipped to support this.
- A scoping review on the societal impact of open science ([see Cole et al., 2024](#)) found multiple pathways that can be considered to promote open research collaboration.

3.3 Socially valuable work did not necessarily involve new research

While new research can contribute to tangible societal change, providing the right information from the existing research at the right time can inform the design and funding of programmes and the creation of services. Relational aspects are crucial to understanding where each other is coming from and can lead to changing mentalities and further research. For example:

- Participating in a research partnership can affect a person's views of and behaviours towards certain people, questions and challenges.
- Creating space for people in different sectors and disciplines to come together, learn from one another and share ongoing work/research is beneficial for research, policy and practice.
- Working with different communities accessing services can increase their visibility and access to services, as well as translating work in a way that is accessible and interesting to everyone.
- Partnerships help hold organisations to account and encourage improvements to services. For example, it is important to change the role and approach of the police to people experiencing acute mental health distress. Partnerships can help identify strong practices in this regard.
- Collaboration between service providers and people who access those services might facilitate a better understanding of how vulnerability and vulnerable communities and neighbourhoods are connected and/or disconnected to policing and other services.

This does not mean that research partnerships are without their challenges. Co-production of research and knowledge is difficult. Speakers admitted that this is not always something they get right. Differing views across partners as to the suitability and utility of certain research questions and ideas can cause tension. It is important for partnerships to agree on mechanisms for research co-production that meet their needs, is relevant to practitioners, and remains interesting for researchers

3.4 Ensuring the sustainability of research partnerships

Speakers agreed that the more you put into a partnership, the more you get out of it. Building strong relationships and trust between partners is a cornerstone to successful partnerships. While the partners come together to address an agreed issue, partnerships themselves are composed of a range of organisations with diverse needs, interests, resources and approaches. It is therefore fundamental to agree on shared collective needs and interests that constitute the terms of engagement for partners

by collaborating to: develop the values and principles of the partnership; have these clearly articulated from the outset; regularly remind each other of them; learn to compromise for the collective benefit of the partnership; and make resources open, available and easily shared across the partners. Ongoing dialogue about the partnership itself – its structure, decision making, how and when people come into the partnership, and memorandums of understanding – can all help with its sustainability.

Infrastructure and governance are also vital to sustainability. It is important to understand the value of academic independence and criticality, policymaker expertise, practitioner experiences, and everyone's capabilities and constraints, to provide for a balanced partnership infrastructure. Research partnerships must be capable of demonstrating the benefits and values of the partnership to negotiate funding agreements and promote partner buy-in.

3.5 The emotional connection to the work of a partnership

Speakers overwhelmingly agreed that working as part of a collaborative and transdisciplinary partnership is rewarding. While differing occupational cultures and individuals' levels of commitment in a partnership can be difficult, frustrating and result in friction, speakers regarded their experiences positively, describing it as humbling, enlightening and fruitful. It provides them with a valuable seat at the table to discuss issues, share evidence and build the trust to share what is quite difficult and critical for partners to hear. Partnerships can help broaden partners' understandings, focus and perspectives on important issues of public interest, and to approach issues in problem-solving ways.

For more information about the CORD Partnership, please see:

MU funded to establish new criminal justice research partnership – [2 October, 2023](#)

New criminal justice research partnership for Ireland launches (Workshop 1) – [22 January, 2024](#)

CORD Partnership hosts webinar on developing research partnerships (Workshop 2) – [3 May, 2024](#)

Department of Justice hosts agenda-setting CORD Partnership workshop (Workshop 3) – [12 July, 2024](#)