Davies, P., Rowe, M., Brown, D. M. and Biddle, P.

Pamela Davies is Professor of Criminology in the Department of Social Sciences, Northumbria University

Mike Rowe is Professor of Criminology in the Department of Social Sciences, Northumbria University

Donna-Marie Brown is Associate Professor of Criminology in the Department of Sociology, Durham University

Paul Biddle is Research Fellow, Department of Social Sciences

**Keywords**

Co-production research, domestic abuse, evidence-based policing, innovation and reflective practice

**Funding details**. This work was supported by the N8 Policing Research Partnership

## Introduction

Drawing on developments in evidence-based medicine, Professor Lawrence Sherman coined the concept of evidence-based policing (EBP) before the turn of the twenty-first century (Sherman 1998). Wider discussions of evidence-based policy within public administration closely informed its development. Essentially, an EBP approach means that police will create, review and use the best available evidence to inform decisions about practices and policies. As Sherman (1998) argued, EBP entails a fundamental re-orientation of police work, replacing the traditional '3 Rs model' of policing (delivered on the basis of random patrol,

rapid response, and reactive investigations) with a ‘triple-T’ model using scientific approaches to target police activity, test the impact, and track the long-term effect of particular types of intervention. The promotion of EBP is aligned to wider efforts to improve police professionalism and in recent years there has been increased emphasis on an evidence-based and ‘what works’ agenda in policing such that evidence-based policy and practice has become a dominant discourse in the United Kingdom (UK) and indeed, internationally (Knuttson and Thompson, 2017). Rye and Angel (2019), for example, provided comparative analysis of data relating to Intimate Partner Homicide drawn from studies in Australia, Denmark, and the UK. New Zealand Police have worked with public, private and University partners to establish an Evidence Based Policing Centre as an important component of a strategic High Performance Framework intended to reduce crime and related harms (such as road traffic fatalities) (NZ Police, n.d.). As Telep and Somers (2017: 171) noted, President Obama’s Taskforce on American Policing was instructed to seek evidence-based research to support its recommendations.

In England and Wales, the establishment, in 2013, of the College of Policing (CoP) as the body to develop professional practice has led to an increased emphasis on the use of scientific evidence to support operational practice. New entrants to the police in England and Wales now must have tertiary-level education (Ramshaw and Soppitt, 2018) based upon a Police Education Qualifications Framework (PEQF) developed by the CoP with a strong emphasis on research evidence, including that new recruits are taught principles and practices of scientific research methodologies and their application to operational policing. Internationally, EBP is thus underpinned by research and collaboration with other partners, including academics. Such partnerships have existed internationally in many forms and can be traced back to the early decades of the 20th Century (see Mahony and Prenzler (1996);

Wimshurst and Ransley (2007), and Rowe (2009)). In the current experience in England and Wales various models continue as different police services and HEIs have co-produced different forms for the delivery of the PEQF (Ramshaw and Soppitt, 2018). As Goode and Lumsden (2018) have argued, the development of EBP needs to be understood in relation to wider changes in the Higher Education sector in Britain that have provided additional impetus for academics to engage in research partnerships with police (and other) agencies. Furthermore, with respect to collaborative policing-researcher partnerships, Fleming (2012) contends that reflective practice enhances professional knowledge. However, as Fleming and Rhodes (2018) have more recently acknowledged:

> (But) much evidence-based policing takes place in charged organisational and political contexts that ensure that the data are always incomplete, always uncertain, and always ambiguous. So, the meaning of evidence is never fixed, it must be constantly won. (Fleming and Rhodes 2018, p. 22).

As in respect of comparative policing more widely international analysis is complicated in this context by the wide variety of legal, organisational, political and historical frameworks against which policing is delivered. It is clear that in some circumstances reference to the importance of EBP might be little more than a superficial exercise in legitimation. In other circumstances – and the New Zealand case seems to be an example – there is a more fundamental effort towards genuine scientific co-production that can inform the development of policing at a strategic and an operational level. Even within a single jurisdiction, there is likely to be considerable variation in ways in which principles and practices of EBP might be used. Further complexity is inevitable since it is unclear what EBP actually means: the literature often begins (as do we) with the model developed by Sherman and colleagues which had a relatively (in comparison to what has come later) methodological focus.

Subsequent commentary has argued for the expansion of EBP to include scientific evidence developed using other traditions and methods (Knuttson and Tompson, 2017; Brown et al, 2018). Given this complexity this paper does not seek to address all forms of EBP but instead contribute through consideration of the understanding and meaning of evidence across and between HEI and police organisations and to consider what this might mean in terms of co-production. While both of these issues will play out differently in different police contexts the underlying themes and challenges that are identified below are significant to different practices of EBP.

In this paper, we reflect on the quality and status of research evidence in policing through a focus on innovations in policing domestic abuse as examined in three English police services. We make these observations in the broader context of police professionalism and the growing number of large-scale regional police-academic collaborations across the UK which are a part of this shift[i]. As we have noted, these are developing in an international context in which EBP is shaping approaches to training and operational work and this article provides insight that will be of significance to these wider shifts in discourse around policing. The article is organised as follows: first, we make some observations about the key bodies involved in the professionalisation of policing. We then provide an overview of our own study that sought to understand success and to build capacity in relation to innovations in policing domestic abuse. This includes a description of how we operationalised the research. Next, based on the premise that reflective practice enhances professional knowledge, we reflect upon understanding success in the context of policing domestic abuse. Our main argument is that police staff and academic researchers do not always share the same conceptualisations of what constitutes 'evidence' and 'research'. These perspectives are not necessarily contradictory or non-reconcilable and they can be explained by different institutional cultures

and practices. It is important, though, to recognise, acknowledge, account for and perhaps reconcile these differences as academic researchers engaged in the expanding field of policing studies and in the move towards co-production of research.

## Professionalising policing

Several UK bodies already collaborate in a bid to professionalise policing. The CoP is the professional policing body aiming to provide the skills and knowledge required to police efficiently and effectively. It has a mandate to set standards, codes of practice and regulations in policing practice and to ensure consistency across the 43 forces in England and Wales. The CoP worked alongside the What Works Centre for Crime Reduction (WWCCR). The latter was established in 2013 to develop a strong evidence-base for decision-making around crime reduction with a remit that included the establishment a common database of knowledge as well as to develop police officer skills to enable them to appraise and use evidence to inform their decision-making. WWCCR was disbanded in 2017. In order to facilitate access to the latest research evidence, the centre was supported by a Commissioned Partnership Programme, a consortium established in 2013, including University College London (UCL), the Institute of Education (IoE), the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, Birkbeck College and Cardiff, Dundee, Surrey and Southampton universities. This was intended to further facilitate collaborative working between police and academics to build an evidence-base and to enable police to acquire the skills to undertake their own research and evaluations.

Another important network is the N8 Policing Research Partnership (N8 PRP). This

partnership was established to enable and foster research collaborations that not only help address contemporary policing problems, but also facilitate international excellence in policing research. The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE)[ii] awarded the Partnership funds to deliver on a new five-year programme of research and knowledge exchange that pioneers an innovative collaboration between 11 police services and their respective Police and Crime Commissioners and 8 universities in the north of England (Durham, Lancaster, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Sheffield and York), known as the N8PRP. The overall aim is to build research co-production methodology (Crawford 2019) and capacity and test mechanisms for exploiting the knowledge and expertise of the higher education sector in order to strengthen the evidence base on which police policy, practice and training are developed and so support innovation and the professionalisation of policing. The three priorities of the N8 PRP are to: (i) Build research co-production capacity; (ii) Test mechanisms for exploiting knowledge and expertise to strengthen the evidence-base on which policy, practice and training are developed; (iii) Support innovation and the professionalisation of policing. As many have noted this latter priority is complicated by a lack of consensus in terms of what 'professionalism' means in the context of policing. Holdaway (2017) argued it is more appropriate to refer to the 're-professionalization' of policing and outlines various phases since the 1970s in which claims to professional status have been staked. Historically, such a status is applied when an occupation is delivered on the basis of a core tradition of knowledge and research, has a degree of self-regulation, established ethical codes of conduct and is exclusive in the sense that entry to the profession is restricted and regulated. Although often regarded axiomatically to be a desirable status, some have noted (for example, Fielding (2018)) that professionalism might be considered 'obstructive' in a democratic free-society and Morell and Rowe (2020) have noted that EBP and professionalism might often be in tension with established principles of democratic

oversight of policing.

## Understanding success to build capacity through innovations in policing domestic abuse

The N8 PRP funded our research on innovations in policing domestic abuse with a view to understanding success and improving practice. We were awarded funds from the 2017 round of catalyst small grants. The key requirements of the N8 PRP small grant funding stipulates a commitment to co-production and encourages a steer toward the theme of the preceding Innovation Forum, which for the 2017 funding round was domestic abuse. An N8 academic partner and policing partner should be identified on the application and funding was preferentially targeted towards multi-partner collaborations.

Our study sought to develop EBP through helping police and academics to identify more robust mechanisms for knowledge transfer such that innovative practice developed in one area can be implemented effectively elsewhere. The problem of 'transfer failure' is widely noted in the policy literature (Legrand 2012; Stone 2017), and in criminal justice and policing in particular (Jones and Newburn 2007). Our study sought to overcome this limitation of EBP and was designed to move beyond the identification of best practice where the approach is to replicate this but without proper understanding of the crucial local conditions that enabled the initial success. As one sergeant in Fleming and Rhodes (2018:16) research states: 'What works in (Force 1)…won't necessarily work in (Force 2).' These authors note 'If the evidence exists to tell the officer what works in one location, it will not tell her what works best where she is stationed'. (Fleming and Rhodes 2018:16). Our key question was not *was* the innovation successful, but *why* was there success and *what* factors underpinned that relative to other projects.

Our project was designed to enable police officers and staff to work collaboratively to identify areas in which innovation has been successful, and to develop deeper and richer understanding of the enabling circumstances and how these might build capacity in other police services. A central objective of the project was to help transfer innovative practice around domestic abuse as well as, more broadly, to provide police and academic researchers with greater understanding of the mechanisms and contexts shaping successful changes in operational practice. Prior to our research, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary reports (HMIC 2014, 2015) had provided indications of the limitations of the police service response to victims of domestic abuse at the same time as they had highlighted pockets of successful practice. The same HMIC reports provide short descriptions of innovations in policy and practice for tackling domestic abuse in several forces. Within the N8 area alone, police services had (among other things) created specialist posts and new training packages; piloted Domestic Violence Protection Orders; led on Domestic Violence Disclosures; and introduced multi-agency teams, school liaison officers, and victim advocates. The aim of our project was to uncover the factors that explain the success of the initiatives identified. Thus as academics, we worked in collaboration with police staff from three police forces to identify areas in which innovation in policing domestic abuse had been deemed successful. Selected projects were required to meet the criteria of having:

- been developed from an evidence base (defined broadly to include professional expertise, scientific research, or guidance from authoritative bodies).
- been subject to some form of evaluation or review; and
- achieved a demonstrable positive impact (e.g. better victim protection and satisfaction, decreased repeat victimisation, improved case management, improved

offender behaviour, or improved criminal justice outcomes.

*Methodology and Implementation*

The authors of this paper were directly involved in the research conducted. Fieldwork was undertaken in line with the lead University's ethics policies. All participants were provided with a detailed information sheet about the research, their role, what would happen to the information they provided and details about confidentiality, the voluntary nature of participation and how to withdraw from the project at any stage. All participants signed a consent form.

A two-phased, multi-method approach was developed to undertake the research. The approach was specifically designed to identify the factors (and contexts) explaining the success of the initiatives explored and how they might be most effectively replicated in other localities. The project was conducted over a 12-month period.

Phase 1 comprised liaison with four Police Forces to identify initiatives or elements of practice, that existing evidence suggested had made a demonstrable positive impact to police responses to domestic abuse in these Force areas. Ongoing discussions with police, and partner agencies including the Offices of the Police and Crime Commissioners for the force areas, led to collaborative work with three of these police forces and the selection of three initiatives:

(i) The Multi-Agency Tasking and Co-ordination Project (the MATAC) - Northumbria Police

(ii) The Early Intervention Pilot (the EIP) – North Yorkshire Police

(iii) Operation Kyleford – West Yorkshire Police.

All three initiatives were deemed to have met the inclusion criteria. Each had been

developed from some kind of evidence base. The MATAC was based on analysis of police data illustrating the need to tackle a group of serial perpetrators responsible for disproportionate numbers of domestic abuse incidents. The EIP initiative was based on a police analysis exercise to determine officer responses to domestic abuse incidents, which found a number of families required support, but not necessarily from the police. Operation Kyleford was developed based on evidence indicating that a significant number of victims were not engaging with the initial callout officers, possibly undermining safeguarding activities, as well as opportunities to gather intelligence and pursue prosecutions.

Each of the above listed initiatives had also been evaluated or reviewed. The MATAC was independently evaluated (see Davies and Biddle 2017)[iii] whilst the EIP and Operation Kyleford were subject to internal review which generated performance and/or case study data. A police review of the EIP indicates that over 55% of EIP cases resulted in no further reported incidents, with case studies also illustrating the added value of the initiative. The internal Police evaluation of Operation Kyleford found an overall reduction where reports have been closed with 'no further action'. Furthermore, a small dip sample of cases randomly selected for further in depth review also identified positive results, such as better engagement with support services, effective safeguarding measures (such as fitting alarms and assistance with housing) alongside the victim supporting a prosecution.

Overall, these evaluations/reviews illustrated that, although each initiative was not a panacea for tackling domestic abuse, each was associated with a range of positive outcomes reflecting our criteria (e.g. better victim protection, improved offender behavior and improved case management). A demonstrable positive impact was found in each intervention. However, it is important to note that the research evaluations and evidence

base had limitations which are likely to impact on the reliability and validity of the findings they generated and we return to this caveat later in this paper.

The second phase of our project comprised qualitative research into each innovation. We conducted semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders identified during phase 1 of the research. Key police personnel included project leads and police staff engaged operationally in the initiatives. Other stakeholders included those supporting victims and perpetrators from (multi-agency) partner agencies. An interview guide was developed to elicit information about the key contextual factors that contributed to the positive outcomes identified, and how other police forces might replicate these interventions in a way that ensures positive impacts are replicated.

In total, we conducted 18 interviews with police officers and staff and a further 13 with representatives of other agencies involved in the initiatives. These interviews were undertaken either face-to-face or by telephone and participant selection was based on information about each initiative provided to the research team in Phase 1. Interviews were recorded and transcribed and then subject to thematic analysis and coded independently by the researchers and then in a collaborative phase. The interviews followed a semi-structured schedule of prompting questions designed such that conversations would explore a range of issues including: roles and responsibilities; the characteristics, knowledge and experience of project staff; clarity of roles and responsibilities; examples of positive impacts; the nature, impact and challenges of partnership working; leadership, management and communication and the role of wider policy and operational environment and its impact on the project in question.

## Reflections on understanding research

Drawing on our experience of understanding success to build capacity through innovations in policing domestic abuse, we now reflect on the quality and status of research evidence in policing. Our collaborative work produced some interesting variations in terms of understandings of research and evidence in this context. Here we reflect on what counts as research, what passes as 'evidence' and 'what works'. We commence by reflecting on dominant understandings of research and evidence in policing. We then narrow the focus and reflect on the extent to which these pervasive characteristics of scientific evaluation were evident in our collaborative project. However, unlike much of the excellent emerging literature on EBP (see Brown et al 2018 for a summary) the focus on the discussion below is not on epistemological or methodological strategies but instead we concentrate on a lack of shared understanding between researcher and practitioner parties. Our reflections, based on our experiences of the research study outlined above, reveal significant variations in interpretation and application of the key characteristics of research.

### *What criteria determines what works? What counts as research and what counts as evidence?*

As a broad opening statement, it is fair to state that what has traditionally counted as good and robust evidence and therefore research, and subsequently what is deemed to work, is heavily determined by dominant understandings of research and evidence emerging from what social scientists know as the positivist research tradition. Such approaches to research and the gathering and use of evidence are underpinned by the empirical methods of the natural sciences. Such scientific inquiry relies on observations and measurements, survey research and experimental approaches. This tradition promotes research knowledge that is

value-free and such research aims to be neutral, impartial and dispassionate, stripped of the academic researchers own beliefs, values, prejudices and opinions (Davies and Francis 2018). Much of the activity in policework and indeed policing research has become wedded to, and dominated by, this research paradigm. For example, see the WWCCR referred to above and below which ostensibly drew on the Maryland Scientific Methods Scale (SMS) in its ambition to develop a strong evidence base linked to crime reduction. This five-point scale (see below) ranges from 1, for evaluations based on simple cross sectional correlations which equate to 'possible impact', through 'what's promising' to the 'gold standard' of 5 for systematic reviews and randomised control trials which are held to robustly demonstrate 'what works',

*The Maryland Scientific Methods Scale (SMS)*

**Level 1:**

Either (a) a cross-sectional comparison of treated groups with untreated groups, or (b) a before-and-after comparison of treated group, without an untreated comparison group. No use of control variables in statistical analysis to adjust for differences between treated and untreated groups or periods.

**Level 2:**

Use of adequate control variables and either (a) a cross-sectional comparison of treated groups with untreated groups, or (b) a before-and-after comparison of treated group, without an untreated comparison group. In (a), control variables or matching techniques used to account for cross-sectional differences between treated and controls groups. In (b), control variables are used to account for before-and-after changes in macro level factors.

**Level 3:**

Comparison of outcomes in treated group after an intervention, with outcomes in the treated group before the intervention, and a comparison group used to provide a counterfactual (e.g. difference in difference). Justification given to choice of comparator group that is argued to be similar to the treatment group. Evidence presented on comparability of treatment and control groups. Techniques such as regression and propensity score matching may be used to adjust for difference between treated and untreated groups, but there are likely to be important unobserved differences remaining.

**Level 4:**

Quasi-randomness in treatment is exploited, so that it can be credibly held that treatment and control groups differ only in their exposure to the random allocation of treatment. This often entails, for example, measurement of the impact of discontinuing treatment, in order to demonstrate its effectiveness.

**Level 5:**

Reserved for research designs that involve explicit randomisation into treatment and control groups, with Randomised Control Trials (RCTs) providing the definitive example. Extensive evidence provided on comparability of treatment and control groups, showing no significant differences in terms of levels or trends. Control variables may be used to adjust for treatment and control group differences, but this adjustment should not have a large impact on the main results. Attention paid to problems of selective attrition from randomly assigned groups, which is shown to be of negligible importance. There should be limited or, ideally, no occurrence of 'contamination' of the control group with the treatment.

Adapted from: What Works Centre of Local Economic Growth

http://www.whatworksgrowth.org/about-us/our-workshops/

The above model embodies some key assumptions about valid and replicable research. The SMS clearly aligns – and privileges – some types of research within the five-point scale to that which will indicate what is impactful. It relegates other types of research to a lower, less influential level. Research methodologies that do not involve RCTs or systematic reviews are likely to lead to results that have less authority in claiming impact. A hierarchy or pyramid of research evidence is thus constructed.

Several of the WWCCR partners pioneered innovative adaptations of the SMS. Indeed, academics at UCL, drawing on insights from realistic evaluation, developed the EMMIE Framework[iv] – a rating and ranking system – to help practitioners and decision-makers understand what works and what doesn't according to the best available evidence (see Bowers et al 2017). Clearly the partners in this early collaboration were directly involved in refining the criteria for determining what works. New developments in evidence-based policing research were constructing a more varied and inclusive palate of what counts as research and what counts as evidence.

Social science research, criminological research and policing research, increasingly encompasses a wide variety of methodological approaches, styles and practices none of which takes place in a political or moral vacuum. Research is a deeply political process (Hughes 2000). The hierarchical scale outlined above, we argue, offers a way for us to begin illustrating this. Advocates of realistic evaluation doubt whether outcome-oriented evaluation is a good way of finding out whether interventions are successful or not because they assume that interventions will have the same impact in all situations (Pawson and Tilley 1997). In realistic evaluation, measures are expected to vary in impact depending on the circumstances

in which they are introduced. The key question is ‘what works for whom in what circumstances?’ In order to answer this, the research must measure contexts (the conditions needed to trigger mechanisms), mechanisms (what causes the intervention to have an impact) and outcomes (the practical effects of the mechanisms). Our first key observation thus raises questions about the enduring domain assumptions implicit within approaches to ‘scientific’ evidence-based policing.

*Understanding research in policing domestic abuse*

As noted above, projects were included in our research if they met criteria relating to evidence and evaluation in their development. Potential police partners were initially asked to propose projects that were innovative in terms of domestic abuse, had been developed from an evidence base, and had been subject to evaluation. We initially liaised for several months with police colleagues in four force areas to identify suitable projects. Though three forces eventually did so, it was often apparent that there was a lack of information about the origins and rationale of the projects under consideration. Officers and staff engaged in the delivery of operational projects or the development of new interventions tended not to know what the evidential root of the work was, or if it had one. Frequently it was noted that a particular project was based on research but, when pushed, this could not be substantiated to any extent. Similarly, in terms of evaluation, we were often told that the intervention had been a success and had positive outcomes but there was usually very little substantial evidence to support this that would be recognised as using a robust evaluation methodology (the MATAC project in Force 1 was the exception in this sense). It is important to recognise that this does not necessarily mean that there was no evidential basis or research underpinning innovative practice, or that they had not been subject to evaluation. A positive interpretation might be

that the projects were developed based on the application of professional experience knowledge and had subsequently been evaluated, but that the staff engaged with the research team were unaware of that dual process. If that were so then it is notable that written evidence of those processes was not available in two of the three innovations. More negatively, it might be that the projects were not developed from an evidential base, and were not subject to evaluation. In practice, our research found that each project was underpinned by some professional knowledge and evidence but that the nature of this was considerably adrift from most social science academy standards of research methodology and certainly from the 'gold standard' Maryland Scientific Methods Scale advanced by proponents of a positivistic version of evidence-based policing (see above).

In each of the three innovations we examined, practice was originally derived from the basis of evidence that referred to internal police data. External scientific research did not feature as the root of these innovative practices and so there was a limited evidential base. None was based on large scale, multi-site research but more typically based on routine performance data. In Force 3, for example, the project to deploy a 'DA Car' had been developed following analysis of police statistics, such that the car was deployed in relation to 'hot spots' and 'hot times' apparent from operational data on cases reported. Equally, the 'success' of the intervention was judged in terms of the amount of cases responded to, and victim satisfaction with the response provided. This is a relatively modest research base, but the innovation was judged to meet the inclusion criteria for our research purposes. If it had been excluded on the basis that the research base was inadequate then it would have been difficult to find any case study projects to include in the second phase of the work. For some, the modest research base may be unsurprising. Fleming and Rhodes (2018) report on focus group discussions with police across the UK finding little prior knowledge of evidence-based policing. Furthermore,

they observe that where evidence-based policing was discussed the tone of these discussions was less practical in nature and they reported few discussions of specific RCTs. One of their police constable respondents opined: 'The vast majority of the frontline would struggle to see the relevance (of research)'. This lack of research informed practice is widely noted in social science studies of operational policing, and was identified by Banton (1964), in what is usually regarded as the first British study of police work.[v]

The MATAC drew on internal and external research and evidence as a central part of the intervention work. Interestingly, non-police stakeholders (multi-agency partners) often regarded police evidence and data to be highly authoritative and this provided a compelling reason for their engagement in the MATAC partnership work. The apparent certainty of the data used in the project was thus greatly valued by other agencies. For an offender to be included in the MATAC project they had to have committed at least 2 domestic abuse offences against at least two victims during the previous two years. Police data was used to rank offenders based on a contextually tailored Recency, Frequency, and Gravity (RFG) scale associated with their crimes. Police staff, officers, and external partners commonly reported when interviewed that this provided an authoritative hierarchical ranking that was widely perceived to be robust. On this basis, it became easier to create consensus around those perpetrators that ought to become the focus of interventions, at least amongst the police members of the MATAC (given that only a very small number of offenders could be included, based on limited resources). Nonetheless, our interviews showed that what constitutes research evidence varies amongst the different individuals involved in the MATAC. For some it is professional insight and/or expertise, for others it is rigorous evaluation demonstrating particular effects. Often it was implied that the evidential basis of the work stemmed from the insight of local police leaders who had instigated the work,

implicitly privileging their professional expertise. In a deferential and hierarchical environment, the experiential perspective of senior leaders was regarded by subordinates as a sufficient evidential basis. Surveys about receptivity to research in policing (Palmer 2011 and Lum et al 2012) show that officers rely on and prefer professional experience rather than research. However, it also seems that, the more officers know about research, the less they believe that the police alone have enough information about crime and what to do about it. Moreover, the more officers are exposed to research and the more it is a part of their professional experience, the more they are likely to draw on research to inform policing policy and their practice (Fleming 2015). Fleming and colleagues discuss the proper status of experience as a form of evidence in policing (2015, 2018) and we return to this below.

**The quality and status of evidence in policing domestic abuse**

Lumsden and Goode (2018) have focused on police officer and staff understandings of evidence-based policing and research. Their research, like ours, draws on semi-structured interviews to provide a glimpse into police officer and staff who have key in-force roles in relation to the utilisation of research evidence or who have experience of undertaking research and/or collaborating professionally with academics understandings of evidence-based policing and its implementation. This research reports:

> It is clear that the evidence-based policing movement risks de-legitimising forms of sociological and criminological research in/on crime, security and policing, which could benefit officers, police organisations and the wider public(s) impacted upon by the substantial police reform currently in progress and in a 'constant state of 'becoming' (Lumsden and Goode 2018, p. 826).

What was apparent from our study was that ‘good research’ and ‘robust evidence’ were understood only through negotiated agreement, there was not an inherent shared understanding of what such terms mean. This suggests a further challenge in the development of cross-sector partnerships that can engage in the co-production of knowledge. As is noted elsewhere, academic researchers and police colleagues are hampered by different expectations, organisation, and cultural practices (Telep and Somers 2017). Our reflections suggest that when pushed police who are engaged as respondents in research and evaluations of initiatives, will interpret robust research as research which is akin to what they typically understand as evidence. Police evidence tends to be understood in instrumental terms, as would evidence for forensic purposes: it is valuable if it is useful to a further end, whether that be to strengthen a case for prosecution or another criminal justice outcome. As Crawford (2020) argued this is a (problematic) model in academic research in that it suggests a straightforward linear relationship between the external researchers and the police, in which the former produce definitive data that is delivered to the latter as a client. Thus for these police partners robust research might equate to quantitative or qualitative data indicating a reduced prevalence of incidents or a decline in risk levels. In academic research, we submit, ‘evidence’ tends to be regarded as provisional and conditional, since ‘falsifiability’ is a central scientific principle. In the police environment the ‘best evidence’ underpinning innovation was sometimes not apparent, sometimes slight, and sometimes of dubious pedigree. In seeking to develop strategies of EBP, it might be necessary to understand more about how police officers and staff perceive evidence and what value they anticipate from its development. In terms of recent debates about EBP, there has been greater emphasis on not only the methods and subjects of experimentation and analysis but also the cultural and organisational barriers that might inhibit its development. Research that adopts a critical perspective to the gold standard level 5 on the SMS has identified that embedding this EBP

approach is problematic for cultural reasons as police will often tend to foreground custom and practice such that competing perspectives are not valued. Macauley and Rowe (2019) argued, following Fleming and Rhodes (2018) that successful innovation within policing must be carried out in ways consistent with the organisational context and culture. Our experience reinforces this and we are not advocating a binary hierarchy that privileges 'pure scientific' evidence above 'applied occupational' evidence.

*Collaborative and co-produced research*

In respect of the MATAC, the status of the evidence that underpinned this innovation was regarded by some as significant to its success. Independent researchers had evaluated the project, and this enhanced its credibility among those interviewed. Moreover, the Home Office Innovation Fund rather than core police resources funded the MATAC project. One of the police members leading the project argued that this status had a significant impact on the internal police service response to the work involved. Notably, the independent funding (in the sense that it was not from core police budgets) meant that there were resources sufficient to implement the project on a force-wide basis. Related to this, because it was overtly innovative, the project had 'permission to fail' rather than being 'doomed to success' (Fleming and Wingrove 2017). This reflects a widely noted cultural and organisational imperative for projects to been seen as successful and that this is associated with the career development of those who lead them. One person interviewed noted 'there was less cynicism around the project, and internally we were under less pressure. Because it was an 'innovation' fund, we were given more room to experiment and staff bought into it more easily'. This suggests that shifting the cultural environment within policing such that it can become more receptive to innovation, trialling new projects, and critical reflection – inherent features of social scientific practice – is possible, albeit in this case this was only achieved because the

project was identified as outside the mainstream of police activity.

*Evidence-based policing, varieties of knowledge and improving the response to domestic abuse*

The 'best available' evidence will use appropriate research methods (including randomised controlled trials (RCTs), ethnography, or rapid evidence assessments (REAs)) and sources as determined by a study's objectives rather than on an a priori basis. Like any other work, research into the policing of domestic abuse should be ethical, sensitively conducted, peer reviewed and transparent about its methods, limitations, and how its conclusions were reached. The theoretical basis and context of the research should also be made clear. Where there is little or no formal research, other evidence such as professional consensus and peer review – including the ethics of the interventions - may be regarded as the 'best available', if gathered and documented in a sensitive and transparent way.

Fleming and Rhodes (2018) have recently discussed experience as inherited knowledge and evidence. They articulate four ideas associated with the notion of 'experience'. First, experience as occupational culture. Culture encompasses the idea of knowledge where shared beliefs and practices are handed down through generations. Second, experience as institutional memory where 'the tales people tell one another' make sense of the present and selective storytelling of the past is used to justify present activity and future action (Fleming and Rhodes 2018:8). Third, experience as local knowledge stresses the import of contextual knowledge, especially local context and local working practices. (See also Davies and Biddle, 2017). Fourth, experience as craft refers to knowledge as complex, tacit, skill and wisdom based. Our findings confirm that experience as a component of evidence-based knowledge is valuable, and that weaving together knowledge from a variety of sources, including

experience, is important when engaging in a methodology of co-production.

In the three innovative projects we focussed upon, we found that one of the keys to success was complimentary partnership and skills sets. This refers to information and expertise - knowledges from different yet complementary sources - that different professionals bring to addressing complex issues. These features were seen to add value and credibility to projects. That the initiatives benefitted the police (e.g. reducing workload, providing additional support, information and advice) was crucial to secure for police buy-in and success. For example, Operation Kyleford enabled Independent Domestic Violence Advisors to do more effective risk assessments, safety planning, and so secure disclosure of offences that police reported they otherwise would not have identified. Thus, there were clear criminal justice outcomes such that the innovation was complimentary to dominant cultural and organisation values. This further reflects Rowe and Macauley's (2019) analysis of successful innovation in the context of responding to victims of sexual assault that were couched in terms of professionalism and the prospect of getting higher quality evidence: aims broadly compatible with existing occupational culture. Equally, partner staff reported positively that they gained from police ability to deal with confrontational situations, and from data and background information, which tended to be regarded as authoritative.

It is also worth noting that we found a thirst for knowledge about research and about how to build in evaluation and do research amongst the police respondents we talked to. We were alerted to this not only during our fieldwork but also during the course of our various dissemination activities where we have discussed our findings in national and international contexts and with audiences from across the globe. Respondents also recognised that evidence-based policing, especially in the context of innovations to tackle domestic abuse, is time consuming and implementing new approaches requires patience, a point well made by a

district commander in Fleming and Rhodes (2018:16-17) research ‘I’ve tried to implement something in terms of (evidence-based policing), and it’s taken two years from implementing it….’.

Our original formulation for this research stems from a common argument in the research literature: that police staff engaged in innovation, evaluation and EBP often do not have the capacity to reflect properly on the challenges of operational implementation; and that officers involved in operational implementation will often not grasp the value, significance, or – indeed – the potential limitations of scientific research in policing (Crawford, 2017). Researchers from outside the police tend to be contracted to provide discrete evaluations of particular projects; but rarely do they have the opportunity to consider how these projects might be further optimised and rolled out more generally. For these reasons, a ‘dialogue of the deaf’ (Bradley and Nixon 2009) continues to dominate, whereby different parties to research activity apply this knowledge and observe its outcomes in isolation. As a counter to this, and in an attempt to encourage academics to build greater ‘impact’ potential into their work, Bannister and Hardill (2013) noted that knowledge can be more effectively mobilised through greater ‘dancing with new partners’; which is to say, through increased and more meaningful co-production of project design from the outset (Crawford 2020). Not only does such collaboration enhance impact and dissemination through collective contributions to change that addresses processes as well as outcomes (Crawford 2019), the experience we gathered through this project was that it also improved research design and led to useful opportunities to consider matters such as access, consent and ethical considerations.

## Conclusion

Our reflections on the quality and status of research evidence in policing have drawn on our experience of understanding success to build capacity through innovations in policing domestic abuse. Our collaborative work produced some interesting variations in terms of understandings of research evidence of any kind robust, best or otherwise. What counts as research, what passes as evidence and what works in the context of tackling domestic abuse and indeed more broadly in policing, is likely to be strongest when genuine consensus is reached via collaboration and co-production.

Working in collaboration with police staff to identify areas in which innovation in policing domestic violence had been successful and where innovations had been developed from an evidence base, we commenced from the starting point that there are varieties of knowledge operating in police work. We therefore proceeded on the grounds that an evidence base can be broadly defined and might include scientific research, professional expertise and guidance from authoritative bodies. Our reflections suggest the four ideas associated with the notion of 'experience' in policing identified by Fleming and Rhodes (2018): occupational culture, institutional memory, local knowledge and craft are all important features of inherited knowledge and count towards the production of best available if not best research. We have also reported that overall, the evaluations of the interventions – which enabled the innovations to be included in our research – showed that each was associated with a range of positive outcomes (also reflecting our criteria). We also noted that the evaluations had limitations that are likely to impact on the reliability and validity of the findings they generated. None utilized any closely matched control group, or was nationwide, multi-site studies. Sample sizes were also small making it difficult to determine if the positive results identified are due to the interventions or simply chance.

Research covering several decades and across many jurisdictions (local, regional, national,

international and global) to tackle domestic abuse has adopted a variety of different research methodologies. The ethical issues at stake in implementing new interventions and researching the effectiveness of them cannot be underestimated. The checks and balances that passionate and vocal partners bring to such collaborative partnerships help ensure that unsafe practice (Davies 2018) and unethical research does not take place. An increased interest in collaborative working between higher education institutions and policing professionals underpins the police professionalisation agenda (College of Policing, 2019). As networks such as the N8 Policing Research Partnership demonstrate, there is huge potential in drawing on the expertise of multiple stakeholders in aiming to improve policing research to generate the evidence base necessary for the promotion of improved police practice. In moving towards the coveted position of co-production of evidence there are, however, a series of challenges. This research has found that arriving at what constitutes 'evidence' is neither straightforward nor monolithic when researching what works in policing domestic abuse. In some ways, this is related to broader dilemmas that policing researchers and policing professionals face when conducting collaborative research. We need to be attentive to the challenges raised when multiple stakeholders aim to work together. For example, we need to consider how existing power relationships interplay in the context of different working cultures, divergent professional discourses and even incompatible expectations or aspirations for what research can be and can achieve.

Historically, researchers and police professionals have played distinct roles in policing research as researchers have been drafted in to evaluate police management and practice (Reiner, 1992). Contemporary discourses around policing research suggest a destabilizing of the historic hierarchy that situates academic researchers as experts in designing, conducting, evaluating and disseminating research findings. It is a welcome and positive development to see policing professionals move away from being positioned as the subject of external

scrutiny and instead becoming accepted as active participants in collaborative research. However, it would be naïve to assume that such collaborative working will be seamless and without difficulty. As we experienced in this research, working across professional boundaries will raise new and important discussions and debates about what should be researched, how it should be researched and why it is important. As opposed to being a weakness of collaborative working, the different views of the multiple stakeholders about what constitutes ‘evidence’ opened up very productive conversations about what works in the policing of domestic abuse.

The impetus for collaborative policing research is increasing and the volume of it is set to do likewise in light of the new professional developments in police recruitment and education. Our research indicates that collaboration might usefully take the form of co-produced research such that negotiated agreement on the research questions and the research design and methodologies are a conjoined endeavour. Rather than succumbing to the positivist straitjacket of the SMS, or a narrow Sherman (1998) inspired variant of EBP, successful capacity building will need to reconcile varieties of knowledge from all stakeholders and parties in policing innovation such that the knowledge base comprises the optimum mix in specific contexts of culture, memory, local knowledge and skills to inform evidence-based policing.

**References**

Bannister, J. and Hardill, I. 2013 Knowledge mobilisation and the social sciences. *Contemporary Social Sciences*, 8 (3), 167-75.

Banton, M. (1964) *The Policeman in the Community*, London: Tavistock Publications.

Bowers, K., Tompson, L., Aiden Sidebottom, Johnson, S. and Bullock, K. 2017 'Reviewing evidence for evidence-based policing' in J. Knutsson and L. Tompson (eds) *Advances in Evidence Based Policing* London: Routledge.

Bradley, D. and Nixon, C. 2009 Ending the "dialogue of the deaf": evidence and policing policies and practices. An Australian case study. *Police Practice and Research*, 10 (5/6), 423-35.

Brown, J., Belur, J., Tompson, L. McDowall, A., Hunter, G. and May, T. (2018) Extending the Remit of Evidence-Based Policing, *International Journal of Police Science & Management* 20 (1), 38-51.

College of Policing, 2019 https://www.college.police.uk https://n8prp.org.uk

Crawford, A. 2017 Research co-production and knowledge mobilisation in policing', in J. Knutsson and L. Tompson eds. *Advances in Evidence Based Policing*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Crawford, A. 2020 'Effecting Change in Policing Through Police/Academic Partnerships: The Challenges of (and for) Co-production', in N. Fielding, K. Bullock and S. Holdaway (eds) *Critical Reflections on Evidence-Based Policing*, London: Routledge, pp. 175-197

Crawford, A. 2019 Societal Impacts as 'Rituals of Verification' and the co-production of knowledge *British Journal of Criminology The British Journal of Criminology*, azz076, https://doi.org/10.1093/bjc/azz076.

Davies, P. 2018 Tackling domestic abuse locally: paradigms, ideologies and the political tensions of multi-agency working. *Journal of Gender-Based Violence*, 2 (3), 429-446.

Davies, P. and Biddle, P. 2017 Implementing a perpetrator focused partnership approach to tackling domestic abuse: The opportunities and challenges of criminal justice localism. *Criminology & Criminal Justice,* 18 (4), 468-487.

Davies, P. and Francis, P. 2018 *Doing Criminological Research.* 3rd ed. London: Sage.

Fielding, N. 2018 Professionalising the Police, Oxford: Clarendon

Fleming, J. 2015 Experience and evidence: The learning of leadership. *In*: J. Fleming, ed. *Rising to the top: Lessons from police leadership*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1–16.

Fleming, J. 2012 Changing the way we do business: Reflecting on collaborative Practice. *Police Practice and Research*, 13 (4), 375–88.

Fleming, J., Fyfe, N. and Marshall, A. 2015 Making connections between research and practice: Tackling the paradox of policing research. *In*: J. Fleming, ed. *Rising to the top: Lessons from police leadership*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 237–56.

Fleming, J. and Rhodes, R. A. W. 2018 Can experience be evidence? Craft knowledge and evidence-based policing. *Policy & Politics: An International Journal of Research & Policy,* 46 (1), 3-26.

Fleming, J. and Wingrove J. 2017 'We would if we could…but not sure if we can'. Implementing evidence-based practice: The evidence-based practice agenda in the UK. *Policing*, doi: https://doi.org/10.1093/police/pax006

Fyfe, N. R. and Wilson, P. 2012 Knowledge exchange and police practice: Broadening and deepening the debate around researcher-practitioner collaborations. *Police Practice and Research,* 13 (4), 306-314.

Garland, J. 2016 One step forward, two steps backward? Difficulties and dilemmas with connecting hate crime policy and research. *Criminal Justice Policy Review,* 27 (6), 627 -639.

Goode, J. and Lumsden, K. 2018 The McDonaldisation of police–academic partnerships: organisational and cultural barriers encountered in moving from research on police to research with police. *Policing & society: An International Journal of Research & Policy,* 28 (1), 75-89.

Head, B. W. 2015 Toward More 'Evidence-Informed' Policy Making? *Public Administration Review,* 472-484.

HMIC 2014 *Everyone's business: improving the police response to domestic abuse*. London: HMIC.

HMIC 2015 *Increasingly* e*veryone's business: improving the police response to domestic abuse*. London: HMIC.

Holdaway, S. 2017 'The Re-Professionalization of the Police in England and Wales', Criminology & Criminal Justice, 17: 588-604.

Hughes, G. 2000 Understanding the Politics of Criminological Research. *In*: V. Jupp, P. Davies and P. Francis eds. *Doing Criminological Research*. London: Sage pp234-243.

Jones, T. and Newburn, T. 2007 *Policy Transfer and Criminal Justice: Exploring US Influence over British Crime Control Policy*, Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Knutsson, J. and Thompson, L. (eds) 2017 *Advances in Evidence Based Policing*, Abingdon: Routledge.

Legrand, T. 2012 ‘Overseas and over here: policy transfer and evidence-based policy-making’, *Policy Studies*, 33:4, 329-348.

Lum, C., Telep, C. W., Koper, C.S.Grieco, J. 2012 Receptivity to research in Policing. *Justice Research and Policy*, 14 (1), 61–95.

Lumsden, K. and Goode, J. 2018 Policing Research and the Rise of the ‘Evidence-Base’: Police Officer and Staff Understandings of Research, its Implementation and ‘What Works’. *Sociology*, 52 (4), 813-829.

Macauley, M. and Rowe, M. 2019 ‘Happy Ever After? Making Sense of Narrative in Creating Police Values’, *Public Management Review*, doi 10.1080/14719037.2019.1630474

Morrell, K. and Rowe, M. 2020 ‘Democracy, Accountability and Evidence Based Policing: Who Calls the Shots?’, in Fielding, N., Bullock, K. and Holdaway, S. (Eds) *Critical Reflections on Evidence-Based Policing*, London: Routledge: 115-132.

N8 Policing Research Partnership (PRP) https://n8prp.org.uk/about_us/ accessed 11/12/18.

New Zealand Police n.d. ‘Leading the way in Evidence-Based Policing’, https://www.police.govt.nz/news/ten-one-magazine/leading-way-evidence-based-policing, accessed 1 April 2020

Pawson, R. and Tilley, N. 1997 *Realist Evaluation*, London: Sage.

Ramshaw, P. and Soppitt, S 2018 ‘Educating the Recruited and Recruiting the Educated: Can the New Police Education Qualifications Framework in England and Wales Succeed Where Others have Faltered?’, *International Journal of Police Science & Management*, 20(4) 243–250.

Palmer, 2011 Survey of inspectors and chief inspectors in Greater Manchester Police

Ratcliffe, J. H. 2016 *Intelligence-led Policing.* 2nd ed. London: Routledge.

Rye, S. and Angel, C. 2019 ‘Intimate Partner Homicide in Denmark 2007–2017: Tracking Potential Predictors of Fatal Violence’, *Cambridge Journal of Evidence Based Policing*, 3(1-2): 37-53.

Rowe, M. 2009 *Police Education, Professionalism, and Diversity*, Briefing Paper 9, Hobart: Tasmanian Institute of Law Enforcement Studies.

Rowe, M. and Macauley, M. 2019 ‘Giving Voice to the Victims of Sexual Assault: the Role of Police Leadership in Organisational Change’, *Policing: an International Journal of Police Strategies & Management*, 42(3): 394-407.

Sherman, L. 1998 *Evidence-Based Policing*. Ideas in American Policing Series. Washington, DC: Police Foundation.

Stone, D. 2017 ‘Understanding the Transfer of Policy Failure: Bricolage, Experimentalism and Translation’, *Policy & Politics*, 45.1: 55-70.

Telep, C.W and Somers, L.J. 2017 ‘Examining Police Officer Definitions of Evidence-Based Policing: Are We Speaking the Same Language?’ *Policing and Society: an International Journal of Research and Policy*, 29(2): 171-187.

Vacchelli, E. 2015 *Project Muse. Localism and austerity: a gender perspective*. Lawrence and Wishart.

What Works Centre of Local Economic Growth http://www.whatworksgrowth.org/about-us/our-workshops/ accessed 11/12/18.

Wimshurst, K. and Ransley, J. 2007 ‘Police Education and the University Sector: Contrasting Models from the Australian Experience’, *Journal of Criminal Justice Education*, 18(1): 106-22.

[i] For the sake of clarity we acknowledge the authors are connected to such a partnership in relation to the Police Constable Degree Apprenticeship and the N8 Policing Research Partnership.

[ii] HEFCE distributed public money for teaching and research to universities and colleges. It was abolished, as of 1 April 2018, by the Higher Education Research Act 2017, and its functions divided between the Office for Students and Research England (operating within UKRI).

[iii] For the sake of transparency, this was completed by Davies and Biddle of this project team. Due to their prior knowledge, the work on this element of the N8 project was done by the other members of the team.

[iv] The EMMIE rating and ranking system rates interventions against five dimensions: Effect – what is the impact on crime?, Mechanism – how it works, Moderators – where it works, Implementation – how to do it, Economic Cost – how much it costs. For further information see: https://whatworks.college.police.uk/toolkit/About-the-Crime-Reduction-Toolkit/Pages/About.aspx

[iv] We are grateful to 'reviewer 1' for pointing this out.