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Title:

Practicing Co-Produced Research: Tackling domestic abuse through innovative multi-agency partnership working

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Abstract

Increased momentum for co-production in policing research undoubtedly requires collaborative research efforts which include methodologies, philosophies, ethos and indeed partnerships of co-production. This paper explores collaborative research efforts to apply co-production in policing research. It does so through a focus on research and evaluation of the policing of domestic abuse and with emphasis on innovations through multi-agency partnerships. It discusses the challenges of practicing co-produced research in these contexts drawing on two research projects. One experience of research was a contracted evaluation of an innovative approach to tackling domestic abuse. This is used to reflect retrospectively through the prism of doing co-produced research. The second experience of research is used to reflect on having engaged in co-produced research from outset. The paper offers particular insight in to practicing co-produced research in the context of tackling domestic abuse through innovative multi-agency partnership working and more broadly for those engaged in academic–police collaborations in other areas of policing. Furthermore, the reflections may be useful in terms of academic colleagues framing their societal impact in line with the ethos, philosophy and praxis of co-produced research.

Introduction

One of the central issues in the current development of Evidence-Based Policing is the way in which police practitioners and (academic) researchers understand 'evidence' and 'research' (Davies *et al.* 2020). The co-production of research has gained much traction in recent years. Methodologies emerging out of the traditions of participatory action research, co-operative inquiry and experience-based co-design have been championed which counter the 'donor-recipient' model of research. Crawford (2017, 2019, 2020a) in particular has pioneered the case for non-linear impacts being meaningful in the social sciences. Whilst co-produced research is currently being conducted there is little literature to date that explicates the policing specific benefits and challenges of doing so. This article focuses on a priority area of policing – domestic abuse – and evidence-based innovations to tackle it, to examine what some of these challenges are.

In this paper these two contemporary issues – the rise of co-production in policing research and innovations in multi-agency policing to effectively tackle domestic abuse and serial offenders are brought together. Practicing co-produced research in the context of tackling domestic abuse through innovative multi-agency partnership working provides the point of reference. This focus facilitates exploration of collaborative research efforts to apply co-production in policing research through research and evaluation of the policing of domestic abuse through multi-agency partnerships. Two research projects are drawn on. One experience of research is used to reflect on having evaluated a particular innovation retrospectively through the prism of doing co-produced research and the second experience of research is used to directly reflect on engaging in co-produced research. The first project is an evaluation of the Northumbria Police Multi-Agency Tasking and Co-ordination (MATAC)

and the second is an N8 funded piece of research 'Innovations in Policing Domestic Abuse: Understanding Success to Build Capacity'. Both pieces of research involved multi-agency partnership work. Collaboration, co-production and partnership working should all fit together, hand-in-hand and to some extent this paper unpicks how this is so. However, in putting research into the mix, this snug tri-partite fit is challenged and this forms the nub of the problem at the heart of this paper. The discussion unfolds under three main headings culminating in some further reflections that are relevant to practicing co-produced policing research more broadly. The main body commences by contextualising the drift from collaboration to co-production in policing research. The second section drills into policing domestic abuse through innovative multi-agency partnership working and research conducted to test the efficacy and understand the success of such innovations. Having introduced two research projects as ones which may qualify as collaborative and co-produced, they are then used to facilitate a reflective discussion on the challenges of practicing co-produced research in the context of policing domestic abuse through innovative multi-agency partnership working.

From Collaboration to Co-production in Policing Research

In 2012 the Home Office published statutory guidance for chief officers and policing bodies on police collaboration (Home Office 2012). Amongst other matters the guidance covers decision making processes and legal requirements for collaboration. The College of Policing - the professional policing body aiming to provide policing professionals with the skills and knowledge required to police efficiently and effectively - encourages and supports police and academic partnerships and currently lists 19 police-academic partnerships including the N8 Policing Research partnership (see below). In addition, part of the College of Policing's

Competency and Values Framework (CVF) demand police strive to be inclusive, enabling and visionary. Such values demand collaborative partnership work with external partners where shared and collective aims are achieved. Collaboration in policing is heralded as both value for money and a core value. But what direction has collaboration that encourages and supports police and academic partnerships been taking in respect of policing research?

Police and academic collaborations have emerged around the world. As Goode and Lumsden (2018) note these include initiatives in the USA, Australia and New Zealand and several in the UK. One such, the N8 Policing Research Partnership (N8 PRP) collaboration between police forces and universities in the North of England, was established to foster new collaborative research relationships in policing research. The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE)ⁱ 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. With the strap line *Collaborative Innovation – the power of eight*, the overall aim is to build opportunities for knowledge exchange and research co-production between policing and academic partners pioneering 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 professionalization of policing. Building research co-production capacity is the main priority of the N8 PRP.

Whilst collaboration in policing research has led to established police and academic partnerships, the drift towards co-production in research is a rather newer development in knowledge production and this is especially the case in the context of policing reform. Insight into the relationship between scientific knowledge and political power originated in the field of science and technology studies and led to the idiom of co-production emerging in other areas of knowledge (Jasanoff 2004) in the continuing debate about the future of knowledge production (Nowotny *et al.* 2003). According to Innes and colleagues (Innes *et al.* 2019), the term 'co-production' was first coined by Elinor Ostrom in 1996 when researching US police work in the 1970s. Innes (2014) later summarised the key practices of co-production as involving: co-definition, co-design and co-delivery. In discussing what he argues is a shift in the conceptualisation and practice of research and what this means for criminology and academics efforts to demonstrate the societal impact of their policing research in particular, Crawford (2019, p. 2) implies that co-production of knowledge is a form of knowledge that recognises research-informed change is 'a complex, non-linear and uncertain endeavour'. In co-produced research there are likely to be indirect lines of causality effected via plural and collective explanations and contributions to change. Dispersed, cumulative or iterative effects and inter-dependent, relational and processual mechanisms feature heavily. Crawford expands on what the 'routine research practices (from below)' of co-produced research are and thus exposes 'the fluid realities of societal impact' when operating methodologies and operationalising co-produced research. He states that in practice co-production:

..... assumes the lack of a rigid hierarchy of knowledge forms, fluid and permeable disciplinary boundaries, a two-way flow of knowledge between researchers and non-

academics (not simply its 'transfer') and a normative concern with usefulness and action. (Crawford: 2019, p 14-15).

Collaboration and co-production in research are part of the continuing nuancing of evidence-based policing approaches. The justification for co-production in research stresses collaborative advantage can be gained (Durose *et al.* 2012). The above however, also suggests there are challenges to be faced in the effort to adopt and apply co-production in policing research. This paper applies debates about co-production to the experience of policing domestic abuse, in order to illustrate what these challenges are. Before this however, it is worth noting how feminist informed research has, in essence, long been concerned with the co-production of knowledge though the vocabulary of co-production has only recently been employed.

Feminism, Participatory Action Research and Co-production

Feminist informed research has, in essence, always been concerned with the co-production of knowledge though the vocabulary of co-production has only recently been employed.

Feminist research practice has long been discussed by various writers (Gelsthorpe and Morris, 1994; Gilligan, 1982; Letherby, 2003, Longino, 1993; Maynard and Purvis, 1994; Naffine, 1997; Stanley and Wise, 1993). Indeed, feminist praxis is concerned particularly with reflexivity and with how the research process can contribute to transforming unequal or oppressive social conditions. Stanley (2016) has observed that 'once we 'know' about harms, there is a level of expectation that we will also act to make things better.

Participatory action research and co-production in research allow for a movement between intellectual and intuitive or other non-objective forms of knowing and thinking. In the context of narrative storytelling, Game and Metcalf (1996: 168) explain this as movement

between 'distance and proximity'. Under such research conditions knowledge is an emergent property of interaction. Durose and colleagues (2012) argue that co-production in research aims to put principles of empowerment into practice offering communities greater control over the research process and providing opportunities to learn and reflect from their experience. In theory, co-production in research involving multi-agency partnerships has much promise.

Examples of peer, participatory and collaborative research in the field of social control and policing are growing. Harding (2020) for example has recently reflected and reported on a co-constructed feminist research and a participatory action research process conducted with criminalised women subject to community punishment and probation supervision in the North West of England proposing that 'meaningful' participation is about more than process management. It is about how participation in the created research space responds to the groups wider oppression. Earlier than this, Robinson and colleagues (2006, 2007) research focusing on reducing repeat victimisation among high-risk victims of domestic violence reported on the benefits of a coordinated community response in Cardiff, Wales where independent domestic abuse advisors (IDVAs) and victims were involved. Earlier still the work of Farrall, Pease and colleagues (1993a and b) published in the early 1990s embraced the co-production collaborative spirit in the context of domestic violence and repeat victimisation.

As noted above, whilst co-produced research is currently being conducted there is little published on the reflections of engaging in such approaches and the specific benefits and challenges of doing so in the policing context. Thus the orthodox and established literature

remains only partially contested. With a focus on evidence-based innovations to tackle domestic abuse, the remainder of this article explores what some of these challenges are.

Tackling Domestic Abuse through innovative Multi-agency Partnership Working

Policing domestic abuse through innovative multi-agency partnership working is not an especially recent development though protecting women's safety in the home was not a feature of early community safety partnerships (Davies, 2008). Partnership approaches were identified early in the new era of community safety as a way of tackling domestic abuse (Barton and Velero-Silva, 2012). Since the mid-to-late 1980s, there has been increasing reliance on such partnerships to prevent abuse and protect from it. This tradition is well established in England and Wales. Prior to this, single agency responses were typical and there was very little information sharing, particularly between statutory and voluntary agencies. Operating largely within the confines of a traditional criminal justice paradigm which seeks to hold perpetrators to account through legal sanctions and mandated rehabilitation solutions, domestic violence forums proliferated in the 1990's inspired by the 'Duluth approach' in Minnesota, USA. During this decade government leadership on domestic violence saw national action plans emerge. By the turn of the 21st century, prompted by a combination of Home Office guidance and legislative requirements to form partnerships to tackle crime and disorder, information sharing in England and Wales became more routinized (Westmarland, 2012).

There has been significant economic and political change in the period since multi-agency working became the dominant approach to tackling domestic abuse, which have impacted partnership working in many areas of social policy. At the same time, significant victim-

focused policy reform has occurred. A fundamental change affecting the 'policing' of domestic abuse across many countries is the widespread recognition that domestic abuse is an issue of power and coercive control and that it should be understood as a pattern of behaviours that can be physical, emotional, economic and sexual in nature. The changed definition of domestic abuse in England and Wales followed two decades of policy reform directed towards an integrated strategy to tackle VAWG (HMIC, 2014, 2015). There are many criminal and civil intervention options in England and Wales with similar legally enforceable short-term protective operating elsewhere in Europe (Bessant, 2015) several of which are part of a recent shift occurring internationally, of campaigns targeting primary prevention at men (Cismaru and Lavack, 2011).

Over the last 10 years, and in the context of austerity measures, there have been changes to the way in which victim support is managed. Collaboration between statutory agencies and local women's networks has become ever more challenging if not compromised (Davies, 2018). From 2014-2015, provision of services for many victims across England and Wales have rested with Police and Crime Commissioners, forty of whom are also responsible for establishing local policing priorities. The current national strategy 2016-2026 (Home Office, 2019), retains the framework of the four pillars approach set out in 2010 – prevention, provision of services, partnership working and pursuing perpetrators. The Government pledges to drive a transformation in the delivery of VAWG services, making prevention and early intervention 'everyone's business' across agencies, services and the wider public thus continuing the promotion of a co-ordinated response, within which regional and local initiatives have proliferated. Current strategies for the policing of domestic abuse reflect the shift towards plural policing and the embeddedness of multi-agency working to tackle a

greater range of community safety problems. The complex matrix of controls on crime and disorder and the web of services and support for those affected by domestic abuse emanating from an equally complex mix of providers with mandated or non-mandated and voluntary routes of access require tailored interventions to ensure those at risk of perpetrating and those at risk of suffering domestic abuse are being supported by local multi-agency partnerships such that responses are gender sensitive.

Researching innovations in policing domestic abuse

Despite the commitments, strategies, legislative and other reforms noted above, too many women remain victims of domestic abuse with an estimated 1.6 million experiencing domestic abuse in the last year (ONS, 2020a). Almost half (48%) of those adult female homicide victims were killed in a domestic homicide (99). Over the last 10 years there was an average of 82 female victims a year killed by a partner or ex-partner (ONS, 2020b). The challenge to provide a more effective response to the problem of domestic abuse remains in the lap of local stakeholders. Research on the policing of domestic abuse thus continues to thrive and innovations involving new collaborative arrangements in policing domestic abuse are evident across several police forces providing evidence about who to work with to tackle the way the most harmful domestic abuse perpetrators are identified and managed within a multi-agency partnership (see for example Robinson and Clancy 2020). Funders of such innovations will normally require research be conducted to test the efficacy and understand success of such innovations. Innovations funded by the Home Office Transformation Fund such as the MATAC (see below) require evaluation. Those funded by the N8 Policing Research Partnership will already have met criteria that assure a commitment to co-production and multi police-academic partner collaboration.

Evaluation of the Multi-Agency Tasking and Co-ordination (MATAC)

The Multi-Agency Tasking and Co-ordination (MATAC) was designed to tackle the most harmful and serial domestic abuse perpetrators. Developed in the Northumbria police area in England, the aim is to protect victims from harm by encouraging offender behaviour change and disrupting perpetrator ability to commit further offences. The approach is designed to:

- prevent domestic abuse occurring in the first place/limit its re-occurrence;
- ensure victims receive prompt and comprehensive wrap around support where abuse occurs; and
- ensure that perpetrators are held to account.

MATAC comprises a tool and formula to identify the Recency, Frequency, Gravity, Victim (RFGV) of offending, force wide availability of voluntary Domestic Violence Perpetrator Programmes (DVPPs) and a domestic abuse toolkit. Options within the toolkit are designed to facilitate prevention, diversion, disruption and enforcement according to the assessment of an engaging/non engaging perpetrator. A pathway for 'engaging perpetrators' is for those who recognise their behaviour is problematic and want to change. A pathway for 'non-engaging perpetrators' is for those who are unwilling to recognise their behaviour is abusive. Perpetrators can be managed in ways that cut across both pathways. The MATAC process consists of a series of steps that shows what people in each of the relevant agencies of the multi-agency partnership should do. At MATAC meetings, actions are determined to manage perpetrators. Perpetrators are served a Warning Notice whilst the process of doing

so is risk assessed to ensure all safeguarding precautions are attended to via a harm reduction plan and robust wraparound support for potential victims to negate potential escalation of abuse.

The evaluationⁱⁱ reported positive outcomes from the non-statutory MATAAC process in a challenging environment (Davies and Biddle, 2018) at the same time as it exposed contentious issues. Outcomes signifying success include reductions in overall offending of perpetrators after MATAAC intervention as well as reductions in domestic abuse related offending. Measures resulted in the re-housing of serial perpetrators, voluntary enrolments on DVPPs and successful completion of them and greater use of Criminal Behaviour Orders and Warning Notices. In various combinations tailored to suit individual perpetrators needs, these interventions saw reduced RFGV scores and case study evidence of interventions producing lasting changed behaviour amongst perpetrators who were change ready. However, during the course of our evaluation we witnessed some emerging anxieties around the victim safeguarding, safety, risk and the idea of ‘responsibilising’ serial perpetrators (Davies, 2018).

Innovations in Policing Domestic Abuse: Understanding Success to Build Capacity’

This N8 funded projectⁱⁱⁱ was designed to enable police officers and staff to work collaboratively to identify areas in which innovative practice around domestic abuse has been successful, and to develop deeper and richer understanding of the enabling circumstances, the factors that explain the success of the initiatives identified and how these might build capacity in other police services. 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)

A two-phased, multi-method approach was developed to undertake the research which was 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.

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, lead to collaborative work with three of these police forces and the selection of one initiatives from each that was deemed to have met the inclusion criteria and had been developed from some kind of evidence base:

- (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.

The MATAAC 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 MATAAC was independently evaluated (see Davies and Biddle, 2017)^{iv} 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 indicated some degree success using reported incident data and case studies from each initiative provided further testimony illustrating the added value of the interventions. Overall, the evaluations and reviews indicated 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 therefore apparent in each intervention. The second phase of our project comprised qualitative research into each innovation. However, our experience of engaging in co-produced research is the best illuminated by drawing on our collaborative activities during phase 1 of the research.

The MATAAC and the other two innovations we researched in the N8 project all feature the

hallmarks of multi-agency working. The theory of change underpinning these approaches to tackling domestic abuse, not only recognises the importance of engaging in collaborative work to effectively tackle the problem of serial perpetrators, prevent victimisation and support victims for reasons of efficiency, effectiveness and consistency but also to achieve inclusivity and because collaborative working enables the sharing of skills and the shift to impact - problem raising to problem solving - through joint solutions. These are the hallmarks of collaboration and co-production. Whilst the N8 funded research had been framed, expressed and explicitly conducted as co-produced research, the MATAC evaluation had not. That was a commissioned and contracted evaluation which was conducted in the tradition of a process evaluation which bears much resemblance to co-produced research. Research of this nature, though not framed as co-produced from the outset, nevertheless provides useful insight into what co-produced research is like in practice. Retrospectively framing the research on innovations in policing domestic abuse as co-produced enables reflection on the practice of engaging in co-produced research.

The challenges of Practicing Co-produced Research in the context of Policing Domestic Abuse through Innovative Multi-agency Partnership Working

The description of the research projects provided above foreshadows there were challenges in engaging in co-production in the context of policing domestic abuse through innovative multi-agency partnership working. As is the case in the brief outline of the theoretical formulation of co-production described above, representations of co-producing are typically cast in unproblematic ways, a well-made observation noted by Innes and colleagues (2019). They suggest co-production is a 'dirty concept', one that '*becomes tarnished and distanced*

from its 'pure' conceptual origin'. Compromises and amendments are made as such a concept travels to practical utility and transformative action. They argue that 'rather than being a problem, this should be understood as a necessary requirement for co-production as a practical accomplishment' (Innes et al. 2019, p. 385). Those engaged in co-production research in policing are acutely aware of this. Crawford (2019, 2020) for example acknowledges the challenges to research integrity that are presented by co-produced research, '.....these challenges which are never settled but require ongoing vigilance and attention' (Crawford 2019, p. 19). And, in the context of discussing evidence-based policing Fleming and Rhodes (2018) have acknowledged that, '.....the meaning of evidence is never fixed, it must be constantly won' (Fleming and Rhodes 2018, p. 22). This brings us to our own reflections on the research projects described above. There are a number of points at which the work of co-production was messy if not dirty. Engaging in co-produced research required to-ing and fro-ing between 'distance' and 'proximity' (Game and Metcalf 1996) such that meaningful participation was struggled for and sometimes accomplished.

The MATAAC Re-visited

As noted above, though an evaluation of the MATAAC was required by the funders, unlike the N8 funded project, there was no required commitment to co-production in the commissioning of the MATAAC research. The research was therefore entered into as an evaluation with the usual components of a contracted piece of work put out to tender by police (contract description and period, quality price model, a timelined work plan, methodology, social value, proposed outputs and costings). The tendering process involved a competitive review process that will be familiar to those who work with police partners in academic-police partnership. The evaluation adopted a mixed-methods approach to begin

exploring what works, for whom in what conditions, how it works, associated results and consequences – and the relationships between inputs, process, outputs, outcomes and contexts – whilst remaining mindful of organisational, political, financial and personal factors that can influence evaluation delivery. The mixed method approach proposed comprised observations, analysis of perpetrator statistical data with perpetrator case studies to complement, an online partner agency survey (administered at two points during the evaluation) semi-structured interviews and a workshop component. Once contracted the two main researchers liaised to check the planned research remained appropriate. Sometimes this may involve negotiation and revisions and in our continued research in to multi-agency work around domestic abuse we find this is not at all uncommon where new or revised approaches are being piloted, trailed or rolled out. This early discussion confirmed a process evaluation with close proximity between the researchers and the MATAC leadership and partners.

There are numerous challenges to multi-agency working and our evaluation witnessed the MATAC partnership meet some of these challenges. As researchers we played a part in helping partners rise to and respond effectively to them. Many features of multi-agency working are inter-linked and overlap with one another. For example, effective partnerships demand the representative partners are engaged and that these appropriate personnel communicate and share information swiftly. Similar features are inherent to effective collaboration and co-production.

Poor communications can hinder effective multi-agency working and will always threaten the effectiveness of any multi-agency partnership. Within participating organisations

upward and downward communication must be facilitated (Finney 2002). Attendance, participation, and engagement includes information sharing and speaking out even if doing so might be uncomfortable. Data derived from our early mixed methods sources (observations, interviews and first survey) showed a tiny minority of partners had concerns about safety, security and risk. The warning notice and the serving of the letter was used to illustrate these concerns. We could have left the reporting of this knowledge for an interim or final report. We chose not to do so. With careful attendance to the ethics of conducting the evaluation, it was possible for us to use this knowledge to shed light on the dynamics that had also been unfolding within the formal MATAC meetings which did not always run smoothly. Having ample evidence from a triangulation of sources, it was incumbent upon us as researchers to share our knowledge in a timely manner. Following Stanley (2016), once we knew, we felt there was an onus on us to act to make things better. From the outset, our observations and perceptions found that a key hallmark of the MATAC was its strong and impassioned police leadership. The literature often suggests police leadership bias in multi-agency working is problematic, not least because it can engender power struggles. Leaders must acknowledge their role as being crucial for the balance of formality with informal relations, for ensuring agencies are not excluded from participation and that representatives are not silenced by more powerful others (Finney 2002). In the MATAC, the shared aims and values of the partnership (see below) were clearly established and constantly reinforced such that they remained at the heart of the overall ambition. It is not realistic to pretend that our close interactions with the core leadership team and partners had no impact on the multi-agency partnership. Our presence could not be ignored and it made a difference. The hard work in the form of sometimes obtrusive observation, casual conversations, informal and formal meetings and telephone conversations that took place outside of the formal

MATAC meetings had an impact. Differential power relations in partnerships remains important (Crawford and Jones 1995) and the dynamics of this partnership were fluid at the time of our evaluation. The strong leadership was tempered and further strengthened as these dynamics were negotiated in the context outlined above. Thus, we felt it appropriate to report on our discoveries in real time, especially since the issues concerned victims safety. Our interventions at such points were in the spirit of co-production and this represents the movement between intellectual and non-objective forms of knowing. Not only did this lead to amendments to the process of serving the warning notice but also to the wording of it. These changes no doubt reduced risks and improved safety and support for victims at the same time as they resulted in increased confidence in the innovative multi-agency partnership.

Poor information sharing practice can slow down partnership work and the MATAC it had the potential to make case management less effective exacerbating the risks to victims. The MATAC instigated an information sharing agreement for all partners to sign. Some were rather slower than others to do so. We were able to help prod partners by checking the status of the MATAC roll-out and sharing information about revised General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR), myth-busting long held beliefs about what can and cannot be shared by who and when. The two-ing and fro-ing over this concern is interaction that resulted in a co-produced agreement making the business of working together more effective and crucially when dealing with domestic abuse, safeguarding at a safer faster pace.

Finally, this reflection makes comment on the MATAC vision:

.....to facilitate, monitor and evaluate effective information sharing to enable appropriate actions to be taken to help reduce re-offending and to safeguard victims and children from further domestic abuse.

The vision, as were the achievements noted above, was co-produced, co-owned and shared. As such, it was an extremely effective leveller, a useful constant and reminder of the common goals. This reference point could diffuse conflict and help keep the focus even in times of heated debate around the table and in bi-lateral troubleshooting discussions. Often referred to in terms of partner 'buy-in', the confidence and engagement of stakeholders is linked to the strength of the shared vision. Ensuring the shared vision travels to practical utility and transformative action can prove hard multi-agency work. In the same way that effective multi-agency work demands engaged partners and effective communications, so too does effective research. The workshop event organised and facilitated by the research team was an additional moment, outside of the formal monthly MATAC meetings, where such reminders featured. On reflection through the co-production prism, the workshop might be seen as an intervention in its own right which prompted suggestions for enhancements to the MATAC process. The very existence of the evaluation in the early months of the MATAC appeared to add a further level of scrutiny to the existing checks and balances at work within and around the MATAC. One of the contracted requirements of the evaluation was to improve partnership working. The evaluation we conducted but importantly our very presence, offered the opportunity for the partnership to look critically in on itself as it strived to achieve its domestic abuse related ambitions.

Understanding Success to Build Capacity Re-visited

The second research project - the N8 funded research 'Innovations in Policing Domestic Abuse: Understanding Success to Build Capacity' – involved direct experience of research that was co-produced from its inception. Reflections derived from this research are used to extend insight into practicing co-produced research in the context of tackling domestic abuse through innovative multi-agency partnership working though, in light of both research projects featuring innovations to tackle domestic abuse, and the theory of change in all of the innovations being underpinned by multi-agency partnership working approaches, there are several overlaps with the observations made in respect of the MATAC evaluation.

As a reminder, innovations selected for inclusion within this project were required to meet the criteria of having been developed from an evidence base, subject to evaluation and as having had a demonstrable positive impact. Overall this collaborative work identified some interesting variations in terms of understandings of these three criteria in the context of innovations in policing domestic abuse and we are grateful for the open and transparent dialogue that took place between police and academic partners in the co-production process (Goode and Lumsden, 2018). (Davies *et al.* 2020). In the broad context of evidence-based policing developments, and specifically within the N8 police-academic partnership, we comment on the different ways in which police practitioners and (academic) researchers understand 'evidence' and 'research'. In summary, what was apparent from our study was that 'good research' and robust evidence' were understood only through negotiated agreement. 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. Working across professional boundaries raises 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. We concluded that 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.

Furthermore, 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. This was especially evident during our research in to Operation Kyleford. Not only were alerted to this 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. Goode and Lumsden's research (2018) reported finding several instances of officers feeling discouraged feeling impeded in their own research efforts by internal processes being less than transparent and communication with key personnel less than timely. Elements impeding research by individual officers included promotion, transferring to another force, or retirement. These elements conspire towards organisational instability which is not compatible with the co-production, exchange and utilisation of research knowledge in collaboration with academic partners.

Reflections on Practicing Co-produced Research

The experience of researching the two projects discussed above illustrate there are both benefits and challenges to engaging in co-produced research in the context of policing domestic abuse through innovative multi-agency partnership working. As Bannister and Hardill (2013) have stressed, in their discussion about knowledge mobilisation, consideration of the qualities of the contexts in which knowledge is to be deployed and the relationships between them is crucial. Compromises and amendments are made in light of knowing and understanding the implications of these contexts and relationships both in contracted evaluation research as it aims to deliver on the requirements of the contract and in an effort to produce meaningful outcomes and recommendations for improved practice. In the context of tackling domestic abuse it would be unethical if more robust and safe practices were not operationalised with immediate effect. The Hawthorn Effect - when people know that they are being studied, they change the way they behave - is surely a speedy way of producing transformative action, in the context of policing and innovations to tackle domestic abuse it can be a practical accomplishment. The value of mutually learned and mobilised knowledge arising out of both of these research experiences has been illustrated. Relationships, and people within organisations and agencies matter in effecting organisational and cultural change (Crawford, 2017, 2019).

Before moving to conclude, two summary reflection points are made about the review of the two research projects from the perspective of doing co-produced research in the context of policing domestic abuse. The first point concerns key differences in research terms and what this means for momentum towards co-production in policing research. The second point is about co-production and partnership work.

A key difference between the two research projects used as illustrations throughout this article— the MATAC and the N8 funded project ‘Innovations in Policing Domestic Abuse: Understanding Success to Build Capacity’, is how the research was designed, instigated and commissioned. The former was a tender for a piece of contract research which materialized as a form of process evaluation whereas the latter was a targeted call for research bids with a key requirement stipulating a commitment to co-production (a derivative form of process evaluation). This has meant that reflecting on these research experiences from a co-produced research perspective has thrown up some issues that are common to both experiences at the same time as additional different further questions are brought forth from each. Research that is contracted without collaborative philosophy and ethos for co-production of methodology, aims and objectives does not rule out the experience of engaging in, doing and making a positive impact through praxis according to the hallmarks of co-produced research. It does however, produce questions about the way in which research is commissioned and funded. How can contract and evaluation research be co-produced? The process of tendering and contracting research itself surely becomes a much more integral part of generating new knowledge. What once might have been recognized as the starting point of research – tenders and contracts - and the end point of research – outputs and impact – become more collaborative, fuzzier and messier. Whilst police-academic partnerships such as the N8 have pioneered the commissioning of and a commitment to co-produced research in policing and in the context of policing domestic abuse in particular, there may be ways of fashioning routes to co-produced research in policing via other funding streams where such a commitment to co-production does not yet exist. Reflecting on the MATAC evaluation from a retrospective co-production perspective suggests that approaching new innovations in the policing of domestic abuse according to

the key principles of co-produced research may turn traditional understandings of evaluation on its head. As Davies and colleagues (2020:13) have noted:

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.

There may be widespread opportunities to sneak co-produced research in through the back door as well as the front door in the continuous search for effective ways of tackling domestic abuse through innovative multi-agency partnership working.

This brings us to the second point on the practicing of co-produced research. It is well established though often forgotten, that partnership work is hard work. Those who have close knowledge of multi-agency partnerships have witnessed this over almost thirty years. Hard work to the extent that scepticism if not conflict will feature. Over twenty-five years ago, Crawford and Jones highlighted the importance of recognising the existence of conflict and of managing and regulating it through constructive debate and in an accountable manner: 'Conflict may be the healthy and desirable expression of different interests.' (Crawford and Jones 1995: 31). Partnerships to tackle domestic abuse are likely to be especially hard work for individual representatives.

During the course of the MATAC evaluation the research team encountered tensions. Though all stakeholders were committed to the overall strategy, we encountered what

appeared to be tensions between members whose organisational and/or personal priority is ideologically and historically more clearly wedded to, and committed to prioritising energy and funding towards, only one aspect of this overall strategy (Davies and Biddle, 2018). This was exemplified in concerns from those working to support victims indirectly. A minority of these members were insufficiently reassured about the impact – on victims – of serving the warning notice. As other stakeholders directly involved in supporting victims were able to share at our Verification Workshop, an aligned, locally tailored protection package underpinned each letter served. Partners further afield clearly needed fuller information about this if tensions were to be resolved. This anxiety was brought to a head during our evaluation and to some extent *because of* our evaluation. Our contribution was effecting change to processes in real time. Like the point made above about conflict in multi-agency partnerships, more recently Davies and Biddle (2018) also reported on the healthy nature of tensions in partnerships:

The healthy mix of scepticism evident in partnership working means that collaboration is hard work. Stakeholders from charities and statutory bodies must find a way of working such that they become ‘critical allies’

(Davies and Biddle 2018)

If multi-agency working in this area of policing prevents abuse, reduces victimisation and provides safety and security for women and children, it will likely have a plethora of added values including wider confidence in the police and their part in the community safety project. The progressive potential extends far and wide well beyond protected and supported individuals and changed perpetrator behaviour to changing individual and

institutional beliefs, cultural attitudes and behaviours. The hard work is the work of knowledge mobilisation being done as a systematic co-produced process of channelling multiple knowledges (Hardill and Bannister 2013).

Before we conclude, a final point to tie up from the earlier discussion on the challenges of practicing co-produced research in the context of policing domestic abuse through innovative multi-agency partnership working concerns the hard work, that took place outside of the MATAC meetings. This may be a feature of partnership work with police more widely though it is not a prominent theme that is generally reported on. My reflection here is that much of the debate about co-production seems built on the assumption that there are two strong constants: the HEI and the Police. Each of these are messier than this. If police work in partnership with other practice partners, then their coalitions and agendas are likely to be unstable and liquid. Simultaneously, the move in academia towards inter-disciplinarity may mean something similarly unstable and liquid is at work. All these multi-layered collaborations and partnerships suggests something very complex is going on in the new way of practicing co-production in policing.

Conclusion

Increased momentum for co-production in policing research has become central to the current development of evidence-based policing. This paper has explored collaborative research efforts to apply co-production in policing research through a focus on research and evaluation of the policing of domestic abuse with emphasis on innovations through multi-agency partnerships. It has discussed the challenges of practicing co-produced research in these contexts drawing on two research projects. The MATAC evaluation has been used to reflect retrospectively through the prism of doing co-produced research. The 'Innovations in

Policing Domestic Abuse: Understanding Success to Build Capacity' experience of research has been used to provide direct reflections on having engaged in co-produced research.

Reflections on the first research experience has been achieved with reference to and exemplification belonging to some routinely encountered challenges to multi-agency working. A number of useful specific insights arising out of this retrospective reflection on co-produced research have already been summarised. One of the overarching observations to be made however, concerns the additional opportunities for the partnership to be reflexive in its practice at the same time as it looked to achieve its domestic abuse related ambitions. The clearest point at which it is evident such reflexivity is occurring is when tensions or conflict arises and as noted above, this can be a knowledge mobilisation moment. A second overarching point to be made is about evaluation research and how this might be conducted in the spirit and ethos of co-production.

The second research experience has been used to reflect on an issue which is central in the current development of evidence-based policing, namely that of the different way in which police practitioners and (academic) researchers understand 'evidence' and 'research' in the shift towards co-production both in public service reform and in knowledge production. Interestingly, in our endeavor to establish, through the methodology of co-production in research, police-academic partners, discussions with police, and partner agencies led to collaborative work with just three out of the four police forces we had anticipated collaborating with. Phase one of the research had been all about establishing innovations that met the criteria for inclusion in the research. The reflections above illustrate the challenges we faced in adhering to the principles of co-production in policing research.

What counts as ‘good research’ and robust evidence’ in the context of tackling domestic abuse and indeed more broadly in policing, will be what has been agreed through genuine consensus and negotiated agreement via collaboration and co-production.

Though the focus on this paper has been on innovations in multi-agency working to tackle domestic abuse, much policing research features multi-agency working and it may be that the reflections here resonate with those engaged in academic –police collaborations in other areas of policing. Furthermore, the reflections in this paper may be useful in terms of academic colleagues framing their societal impact in line with the ethos, philosophy and praxis of co-produced research. And as a final thought, if there is agreement that knowledge can be more effectively mobilised through greater ‘dancing with new partners’ (Bannister and Hardill 2013), or in the context of policing, through increased and more meaningful co-production of project design from the outset (Crawford 2020), it might also be the case that knowledge can be more effectively mobilised through academic researchers *dancing differently* with our police partners.

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ⁱ 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).

ⁱⁱ The MATAC evaluation was undertaken by Pamela Davies and Paul Biddle, Northumbria University.

ⁱⁱⁱ The N8 Project was lead by Professor Mike Rowe, Northumbria University.

^{iv} 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.