



# Police officers' views of evidence-based policing in England: reflections on working in partnership

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# Outline

- Qualitative study of police officer and staff understandings of evidence based policing(EBP) in England
- Research questions:
  - How are different kinds of ‘knowledge’ and ‘research’ understood by different kinds of practitioner in police organisations?
  - How do they think such knowledge(s) might usefully be drawn upon to improve practice?
  - What ‘work’ are these constructions performing?
  - What might the facilitators and challenges be to effective ‘knowledge transfer/exchange’ and collaborative research/knowledge production?
- Findings:
  - Context driving EBP
  - Knowledge and understanding of EBP
  - ‘Type’ of research and contexts
  - Influence of performance culture

# The study

- One-year Enterprise Project Grant funded via a Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF) 2014-15.
- Aimed to build university/academic and police partnerships with a focus on research, knowledge transfer, enterprise and CPD.
- Social sciences but with cross-disciplinary links.
- 15 semi-structured interviews conducted with police officers, staff and key stakeholders across various forces in England.
- Observations at key meetings and events.
- Access via key stakeholders – ‘purposive’ and ‘snowball sampling’.
- Identities of police forces and individual officers / staff are anonymised.

# The context driving EBP

“...we’ve got significant change – have had since 2010 with the Comprehensive Spending Review – massive change in funding models across policing – having to do so much... more with so much less - and a lot of it’s anecdotal – ‘Oh, this is what we think we need to do’ and 43 forces all thinking they’re going to do it their way. And then we’ve got the Police Crime Commissioners (PCCs)... quite often the culture is that we don’t... want to change anything. So we need to have a big stick waved at us. Rather than it being: ‘You will change because you’ve got no money’. We need to have an evidence-based product that shows us categorically: ‘This is where you were’. For example [with] demand for service...”

(Interviewee 11, Temporary Chief Inspector)

# The context driving EBP

“The Home Office have given the College of Policing a huge amount of money. So they’ve got to have results. If the College of Policing have got to have results, that are based on professionalising... the service, then they need the help of academics – and police to work together and so the push has come from, jointly between the Home Office and the College.”

(Interviewee 10, Temporary Chief Inspector)

“I think from an evidence-base, when you can do high-level things, it’s great to get universities involved [because] then you can get other forces involved and it’s good to collaborate... The... internal stuff which is quick turn-around... is great as well... so - evidence really does work, and it’s really good... you work together from universities.”

(Interviewee 9, staff)

# ‘Patchy’ knowledge of EBP

“Generally, in implementing change, there’s a kind of bottom-up or top-down approach, and for the last 18 months or so this evidence-based practice has fuelled the imagination of those more towards the top. Now that’s partly because most Chief Officers are going to have degrees and post-graduate qualifications and feel happier with academia... What we haven’t... done very well is sell it to the front line...”

(Interviewee 10, Temporary Chief Inspector)

“It needs to come from the top, doesn’t it? If the Chief Officer team *are* signed up to it, it will gain momentum. If they’re not signed up to it, it will be very hard to gain momentum.”

(Interviewee 7, Temporary Chief Inspector)

# EBP as ‘a ladder of some kind’

“It usually involves a ladder of some kind... This is a study which doesn’t really have much academic robustness... and then at the top you’ve got this kind of sampling... which is very, very robust... and... *That* is Evidence-based policing, and *that’s* what we should do.”

(Interviewee 6, Inspector)

“You’re talking about the gold standard of research and the randomised control trials at one end... and then your qualitative side of stuff (of what people think, feel, and their emotions)... on the other side. For me, they’re both equally important. You can’t do one without the other... what we’ve got to do as a force is invest a little bit more in on the qualitative side of stuff and then we can get to a point where it’s embedded, where we can use mixed methods.”

(Interviewee 8, Inspector)

# ‘Hot spots’

“So what is a hot-spot? It needs to be hot, not lukewarm and... you spend x-number of minutes in that hot-spot and then you move on... Getting people to understand that, at my level, or higher level... this means we can allocate less resources to tackle that. But they need managing because what they found with the tests that they’ve done – you can say to an officer ‘You need to be in that’ (like the Met and bus stops) – ‘at that bus-stop, for this amount of time’, and when you start checking... you find they either didn’t go or were there for a longer time or weren’t there long enough. You have to put some resource into actually managing it. But then you can replicate that across the country.”

(Interviewee 7, Temporary Chief Inspector)

# What 'type' of research works in various contexts?

“We... focus on the quantitative side of stuff and the number crunching and surveys... We don't tend to focus on the narrative and the rich source of data that we can get from talking to people and finding out people's experiences and perceptions. And for me that's just as valuable.”

(Interviewee 8, Inspector)

“We do look at statistics but... that's why engagement is really interesting, because you can't measure that but it's clear how people feel is, for me, more important... and massive community feedback about how unsafe they are and 'All this crime!' And there's not... but that's the feeling, that's the perception. But how do you measure that? And if the community feels good – we had a community meeting... and I came out and it's like 'Oh, brilliant, we feel a lot better'. And that's like 'Brilliant!' But then you think, well, where is that, for me to say to anybody (in the organization): 'The community feels better now?'”

(Interviewee 5, Temporary Inspector)

# ‘Performance culture’

“We’re hung up on figures and... a lot of people will say, ‘We’ve had a 500 per cent increase!’ and... it’s results, results, results. If you’ve done an operation, we want to see that crime went down the following week [because] it’s had an effect. And we need to look longer term at actually what does work - and that’s not just your quantitative analysis. It’s a lot more.”

(Interviewee 4, staff)

“...the focus on a performance culture and... the nature of policing doesn’t lend itself to EB practice... The reason for that is... when I first started some years ago somebody said ‘the thing to remember about officers and staff is that officers are brilliant in a crisis because that’s what they’re trained to do... Staff are better at planning. But it’s like, never the twain shall meet... The bit that [officers] enjoy, the blues and twos, the exciting stuff – they just like to turn up and just deal with it...”

(Interviewee 1, staff)

# ‘Cure-all-ills’

“We don’t... think strategically about how we’re going to make this happen... what we need to put in place, what’s the direction of travel, what milestones we’re going to meet, what’s the critical path, what do we need to change...? We look for everything as cure-all-ills.”

(Interviewee 1, police staff)

# Discussion

- What evidence consisted of was subject to contested definitions and meanings.
- Interviewees did not distinguish between ‘academic research’, ‘consultancy research’, ‘in-house research’, or ‘evaluations’, viewing them as ‘*research of sorts*’.
- Concerns re. the usefulness of scholarship can also include ‘the perception that academic theorizing is often too complex, too ethereal, and too detached from the everyday realities confronting...[practitioners]’ (Chakraborti, 2015: 4).
- Officers and staff viewed EBP as a reflection of political pressures and related performance management.
- Tension between officers recognising the ‘gold standard’ requirement of an evidence-base, but also requesting research of a nature which would not fit the ‘gold standard’.
- Resources made available (or not) mean that, like some in-house police research, it may be ‘doomed to succeed’ - but this does not mean that it will have much effect on the ground.
- Distinction between a ‘*reactive*’ culture in operational policing, and the opportunity for a more ‘*proactive*’ strategic approach by middle-management staff demonstrated that ‘policies, metrics, training programs, and system designs’ are often at odds with the realities of work (Wenger, 1988: 46).

Thank you!

Any questions?

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