Climbing down the steps from the ivory tower: how UK academics and practitioners need to work together on alcohol studies.

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Although the relationship is multifarious, there is well documented evidence of an association between alcohol use and crime (Boden, Fergusson, and Horwood 2012; Pernanen 1991; Plant, Plant, and Thornton 2002; Richardson and Budd 2003), with a complex interplay between the amount drank, the pattern of drinking and the individual and contextual factors (Graham et al. 2012). In England and Wales, alcohol-related crime is estimated to cost society £11 billion (2010-2011 costs). However it has been shown that intervening to reduce alcohol use is cost-effective, generating both long-term and short-term savings (UKATT Research Team 2005).

Evidence in the UK tells us that risky drinking is high amongst those in contact with the criminal justice system. Between 64-88 per cent of adults in the police custody setting; 95 per cent in the magistrate court setting; 53-69 per cent in the probation setting, 51-83 per cent in the prison system and 64 per cent of young people in the criminal justice system in the UK are classified as risky drinkers (Newbury-Birch et al. 2016). This compares to around 25% of the general population (Fazel, Bains, and Doll 2006; Parkes et al. 2011). Moreover, prisoner drinking norms differ widely from community consumption patterns (Sondhi et al. 2016).

Therefore, given the high levels of risky drinking, the links between alcohol and crime and the costs to society, it is important to find effective interventions that not only reduce alcohol consumption but also potentially recidivism. Interventions carried out within the criminal justice system could potentially capitalise upon the "teachable moment" considered to be conducive of behaviour change, wherein individuals can be encouraged to consider their alcohol use within the context of their offending behaviour and its punitive consequences (Babor et al. 1989). It is therefore imperative that work in this field is carried out to ascertain the best way to deal with the issues however do academics really have a grasp on the issue or the work needed or are we stuck in our 'ivory tower'?

So what do we mean by 'the ivory tower'? The dictionary defines it as 'a condition or place, such as academia, regarded as isolated of withdrawn from the practical affairs of society' (Your dictionary). Some would argue that this is how academia should be – we academics should be left alone to contemplate and think about the world and yes, as academics we have to publish high quality research in high quality journals as well as bring in research funding (REF2014) which means that time to contemplate research is important. However recently the term 'impact' has infiltrated the academic landscape with academics now expected to evidence impact of our research by proving that we have made a difference. Ref2014 states that Impact is defined as 'any effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public

policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia' (REF2014).

So it is true that academics are not representative of society as a whole? On average, students from poorer backgrounds made up around one in five entrants (21%) to Russell Group universities in 2014-15, compared with 19.5 per cent a decade ago (Supplement. 2016). Moreover 22% of professors in the UK in 2013-2014 were women (Supplement. 2015). Therefore, we argue that academics must do more to integrate with society. One such way is by actually observing 'how' services work. By observing with agencies such as police, accident and emergency departments and paramedics, academics not only get a chance to see how services work in action but give the opportunity for academics to be seen outside the office, taking an interest in how services work (Newbury-Birch 2012).

Research in the criminal justice system is difficult. There are a lot of competing parts to the equation including experience and expertise, values and judgement, resources, policy context, habits and traditions, pressure groups as well as research evidence (Armstrong, Pettman, and Waters 2014). Below we look at some of the issues we need to consider when carrying out research in the criminal justice system.

Research project design

Ethical approval for research in the criminal justice system is difficult primarily because of the perceived coersion and vulnerability of the participants (Jones 2012). However, evidence tells us that participants do not feel coerced if the project is explained properly (Sherman et al. 2007). Researchers must be careful not to promise things they can't deliver, such as telling research participants that taking part in the research will have an effect on their sentence. Practitioners and other key stakeholders within the criminal justice system are often bemused and confused by how long the research project takes from design to dissemination. Moreover it is important that we realise that expensive randomised controlled trials carried out by experts, although very important, are not always necessary or affordable to practitioners.

Practitioners often want, and in fact need 'quick fix' answers to complex problems and telling them that a project may take two years or longer to complete is frustrating to them, many of whom may lack an understanding of what 'evidence' means (Shepherd 2014). It is therefore important to have practitioners involved in all stages of research to help them understand this and understand what is needed from both sides. Furthermore, by doing this academics learn more about the important questions and problems that the criminal justice system is facing which is something that some practitioners think we don't have enough experience of

(Shepherd 2014). This is summed up by Shepherd (2014) as evidence needing to flow through the ecosystem from generation to end-user, both push and pull are needed (Shepherd 2014).

Research participants
Is it true that research participants in the criminal justice system are more difficult to engage with? In fact research tells us that in well-conducted research projects participants in the criminal justice system are keen to take part in research (Sherman et al. 2015). Yes they are indeed hard to contact and often have very chaotic lifestyles, which mean that a lot of effort has to go into contacting people, but it can be done (Newbury-Birch et al. 2014; Sherman et al. 2015).

Outcome measures
Although there have been a number of studies looking at behavioural interventions for risky drinking in the criminal justice system they suffer from low levels of take up and follow-up rates (Orr et al. 2015; Davis et al. 2003). Orr et al, (2013) conducted a pilot RCT with offenders given probation or community service orders in Scotland (Orr et al. 2013). Eighty two offenders were randomised however only 22% (n=16) of the sample were followed up, therefore, no effectiveness data were available (Orr et al. 2013).

Often research around risky drinking is funded by health funding streams such as NIHR or MRC who insist on a primary outcome that is health related (NIHR). Often this is reduction in alcohol consumption (Newbury-Birch et al. 2014; Stein et al. 2010; Stein et al. 2011; Begun, Rose, and LeBel 2011). Whereas there is nothing wrong with this, the question needs to be asked as to what the best outcome measure would be for the policy makers and practitioners we are working with. In the criminal justice system this of course is recidivism (Newbury-Birch et al. 2016).

The theoretical context to why we should be working differently
As stated, research projects in the criminal justice system are potentially complex and context specific and in order to prove effectiveness it is essential that they be evaluated. However, when it comes to informing policy there tends to be an over reliance on evidence from university led, tightly controlled intervention trials which can lead to questions around the applicability of research in the real world (Pettman et al. 2012). Whilst academics and criminal justice practitioners may be seen by many as coming from two very different places, the boundaries between them may not be as large as many believe (Wehrens 2014). A co-production approach involving researchers and criminal justice practitioners working together could result in evidence which better translates into real world practice (Graham and Tetroe 2007).

Wehrens (2014) (Wehrens 2014) outlines four distinct theoretical approaches to undertaking co-production work involving academics from universities and practitioners who are responsible for delivering services. Each of these approaches differs in the level of integration and negotiation between partners, and how meanings are constructed from the partnership.

Boundary Organisations: This theoretical approach to co-production work was first posted by Guston [(Guston 1999) and draws on sociological approaches to boundary work and political approaches to principal agent theory (Guston 1999). A distinct aspect of boundary organisation theory is that each party negotiates the different social worlds in which they operate but remain accountable only to their own organisations. Therefore whilst they may meet to negotiate different aspects of a project, and compromise on goals and objectives each party is still bound to the external pressures of their host organisation, their own timescales, and incentives.

Hybrid Management: A hybrid management approach was proposed by Miller (2001) as an adaption of the boundary organisation approach which was geared more towards the practices within an academic and policy making partnership (Miller 2001). Whilst each party retains a large degree of autonomy within boundary organisations, separation should be practically impossible within a hybrid approach as the social constructs are sufficiently intertwined. Four processes are outlined by Miller which facilitate a hybrid management approach: there needs to be a level of integration between political and scientific elements, such as standards and measures to make sure that each party is speaking the same language (hybridization). However, it is also important to deconstruct these elements so that any underlying assumptions can be addressed (deconstruction). Whilst separation of policy makers and academics should be impossible within this approach there should still be clearly defined boundaries between each party (boundary work). Finally, there should be a coordinated approach to activities to ensure each party knows what they are responsible for (cross-domain orchestration).

Front stage and back stage regions: Goffman's (1990) theory makes in interesting distinction to how co-production work is presented to front stage and back stage audiences. Where the front-stage external audience receive a performance which makes clear that the project maintains and embody certain standards. The back stage is reserved for insiders involved in the project where the 'performance' is deliberately contradicted.

Communities of practice: The final approach proposed by Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002) (Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder 2002)deviates slightly from the other approaches. This approach is defined by individuals, or groups of people from

different backgrounds coming together, as they share a passion about a particular topic and can deepen their knowledge and experience by continually interacting with each other. This approach is also more empirical in nature and focuses on shared learning and experience from each party which can contribute to the project.

Whilst the theoretical approaches outlined above provide a useful guide to conducting co-production work, it can be difficult to adhere to any one approach. However, evidence has shown that when this happens it can be really effective (Sherman et al. 2015). For example, the UK Restorative Justice Trials involved embedding researchers into police stations in London and Northumbria. The researchers worked day to day with the police officers that were delivering the interventions and were situated within the same offices in police stations with the police officers. Team meetings and every aspect of the work was discussed and decided together. This enabled shared learning on moving the project forward.

Conclusions

With the cuts in public services in the UK and the need for more impact, as well as the difficulties in recruiting practitioners and participants to research projects we, as academics, need to do more. We argue that by working WITH practitioners from an early stage in co-production work could be beneficial. Whilst some may argue that academics and practitioners come from different worlds, when academics climb down from the tower these differences are often negligible. By working together and drawing on each party's knowledge and experience it is possible to deliver services which are more translational into real world practice (Minkler and Wallerstein 2011; Cooke et al. 2015; Graham and Tetroe 2007). Whilst there are many challenges in co-producing research in the criminal justice system, when it does happen the results can be particularly illuminating (Sherman at al, 2007).

Furthermore, by examining what the primary outcome of interest is to those that work in the field rather than what funding agencies tell us we must use, we may engage in a more co-productive way that enables everyone to achieve what they need. Moreover more work is needed to see how this kind of approach can be achieved both in the UK and internationally.

Conflicts of interest

The authors have no conflict of interest.

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