



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

Journal:	<i>International Journal of Prisoner Health</i>
Manuscript ID	IJPH-06-2016-0018
Manuscript Type:	Editorial

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Manuscripts

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3 Although the relationship is multifarious, there is well documented evidence of an
4 association between alcohol use and crime (Boden, Fergusson, and Horwood 2012;
5 Pernanen 1991; Plant, Plant, and Thornton 2002; Richardson and Budd 2003), with a
6 complex interplay between the amount drunk, the pattern of drinking and the
7 individual and contextual factors (Graham et al. 2012). In England and Wales,
8 alcohol-related crime is estimated to cost society £11 billion (2010-2011 costs).
9 However it has been shown that intervening to reduce alcohol use is cost-effective,
10 generating both long-term and short-term savings (UKATT Research Team 2005).
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15 Evidence in the UK tells us that risky drinking is high amongst those in contact with
16 the criminal justice system. Between 64-88 per cent of adults in the police custody
17 setting; 95 per cent in the magistrate court setting; 53-69 per cent in the probation
18 setting, 51-83 per cent in the prison system and 64 per cent of young people in the
19 criminal justice system in the UK are classified as risky drinkers (Newbury-Birch et al.
20 2016). This compares to around 25% of the general population (Fazel, Bains, and Doll
21 2006; Parkes et al. 2011). Moreover, prisoner drinking norms differ widely from
22 community consumption patterns (Sondhi et al. 2016).
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28 Therefore, given the high levels of risky drinking, the links between alcohol and
29 crime and the costs to society, it is important to find effective interventions that not
30 only reduce alcohol consumption but also potentially recidivism. Interventions
31 carried out within the criminal justice system could potentially capitalise upon the
32 “teachable moment” considered to be conducive of behaviour change, wherein
33 individuals can be encouraged to consider their alcohol use within the context of
34 their offending behaviour and its punitive consequences (Babor et al. 1989). It is
35 therefore imperative that work in this field is carried out to ascertain the best way to
36 deal with the issues however do academics really have a grasp on the issue or the
37 work needed or are we stuck in our ‘ivory tower’?
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44 So what do we mean by ‘the ivory tower’? The dictionary defines it as ‘a condition or
45 place, such as academia, regarded as isolated or withdrawn from the practical affairs
46 of society’ (Your dictionary). Some would argue that this is how academia should be
47 – we academics should be left alone to contemplate and think about the world and
48 yes, as academics we have to publish high quality research in high quality journals as
49 well as bring in research funding (REF2014) which means that time to contemplate
50 research is important. However recently the term ‘impact’ has infiltrated the
51 academic landscape with academics now expected to evidence impact of our
52 research by proving that we have made a difference. Ref2014 states that Impact is
53 defined as ‘any effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public
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3 policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia'
4 (REF2014).
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7 So it is true that academics are not representative of society as a whole? On average,
8 students from poorer backgrounds made up around one in five entrants (21%) to
9 Russell Group universities in 2014-15, compared with 19.5 per cent a decade ago
10 (Supplement. 2016). Moreover 22% of professors in the UK in 2013-2014 were
11 women (Supplement. 2015). Therefore, we argue that academics must do more to
12 integrate with society. One such way is by actually observing 'how' services work. By
13 observing with agencies such as police, accident and emergency departments and
14 paramedics, academics not only get a chance to see how services work in action but
15 give the opportunity for academics to be seen outside the office, taking an interest
16 in how services work (Newbury-Birch 2012).
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22 Research in the criminal justice system is difficult. There are a lot of competing parts
23 to the equation including experience and expertise, values and judgement,
24 resources, policy context, habits and traditions, pressure groups as well as research
25 evidence (Armstrong, Pettman, and Waters 2014). Below we look at some of the
26 issues we need to consider when carrying out research in the criminal justice system.
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30 ***Research project design***

31 Ethical approval for research in the criminal justice system is difficult primarily
32 because of the perceived coercion and vulnerability of the participants (Jones 2012).
33 However, evidence tells us that participants do not feel coerced if the project is
34 explained properly (Sherman et al. 2007). Researchers must be careful not to
35 promise things they can't deliver, such as telling research participants that taking
36 part in the research will have an effect on their sentence. Practitioners and other key
37 stakeholders within the criminal justice system are often bemused and confused by
38 how long the research project takes from design to dissemination. Moreover it is
39 important that we realise that expensive randomised controlled trials carried out by
40 experts, although very important, are not always necessary or affordable to
41 practitioners.
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48 Practitioners often want, and in fact need 'quick fix' answers to complex problems
49 and telling them that a project may take two years or longer to complete is
50 frustrating to them, many of whom may lack an understanding of what 'evidence'
51 means (Shepherd 2014). It is therefore important to have practitioners involved in all
52 stages of research to help them understand this and understand what is needed
53 from both sides. Furthermore, by doing this academics learn more about the
54 important questions and problems that the criminal justice system is facing which is
55 something that some practitioners think we don't have enough experience of
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3 (Shepherd 2014). This is summed up by Shepherd (2014) as evidence needing to flow
4 through the ecosystem from generation to end-user, both push and pull are needed
5 (Shepherd 2014).
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8 **Research participants**

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

20 Although there have been a number of studies looking at behavioural interventions
21 for risky drinking in the criminal justice system they suffer from low levels of take up
22 and follow-up rates (Orr et al. 2015; Davis et al. 2003). Orr et al, (2013) conducted a
23 pilot RCT with offenders given probation or community service orders in Scotland
24 (Orr et al. 2013). Eighty two offenders were randomised however only 22% (n=16) of
25 the sample were followed up, therefore, no effectiveness data were available (Orr et
26 al. 2013).
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31 Often research around risky drinking is funded by health funding streams such as
32 NIHR or MRC who insist on a primary outcome that is health related (NIHR). Often
33 this is reduction in alcohol consumption (Newbury-Birch et al. 2014; Stein et al.
34 2010; Stein et al. 2011; Begun, Rose, and LeBel 2011). Whereas there is nothing
35 wrong with this, the question needs to be asked as to what the best outcome
36 measure would be for the policy makers and practitioners we are working with. In
37 the criminal justice system this of course is recidivism (Newbury-Birch et al. 2016).
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42 **The theoretical context to why we should be working differently**

43 As stated, research projects in the criminal justice system are potentially complex
44 and context specific and in order to prove effectiveness it is essential that they be
45 evaluated. However, when it comes to informing policy there tends to be an over
46 reliance on evidence from university led, tightly controlled intervention trials which
47 can lead to questions around the applicability of research in the real world (Pettman
48 et al. 2012). Whilst academics and criminal justice practitioners may be seen by
49 many as coming from two very different places, the boundaries between them may
50 not be as large as many believe (Wehrens 2014). A co-production approach involving
51 researchers and criminal justice practitioners working together could result in
52 evidence which better translates into real world practice (Graham and Tetroe 2007).
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3 Wehrens (2014) (Wehrens 2014) outlines four distinct theoretical approaches to
4 undertaking co-production work involving academics from universities and
5 practitioners who are responsible for delivering services. Each of these approaches
6 differs in the level of integration and negotiation between partners, and how
7 meanings are constructed from the partnership.
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11 *Boundary Organisations:* This theoretical approach to co-production work was first
12 posted by Guston [(Guston 1999) and draws on sociological approaches to boundary
13 work and political approaches to principal agent theory (Guston 1999). A distinct
14 aspect of boundary organisation theory is that each party negotiates the different
15 social worlds in which they operate but remain accountable only to their own
16 organisations. Therefore whilst they may meet to negotiate different aspects of a
17 project, and compromise on goals and objectives each party is still bound to the
18 external pressures of their host organisation, their own timescales, and incentives.
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24 *Hybrid Management:* A hybrid management approach was proposed by Miller
25 (2001) as an adaption of the boundary organisation approach which was geared
26 more towards the practices within an academic and policy making partnership
27 (Miller 2001). Whilst each party retains a large degree of autonomy within boundary
28 organisations, separation should be practically impossible within a hybrid approach
29 as the social constructs are sufficiently intertwined. Four processes are outlined by
30 Miller which facilitate a hybrid management approach: there needs to be a level of
31 integration between political and scientific elements, such as standards and
32 measures to make sure that each party is speaking the same language
33 (hybridization). However, it is also important to deconstruct these elements so that
34 any underlying assumptions can be addressed (deconstruction). Whilst separation of
35 policy makers and academics should be impossible within this approach there should
36 still be clearly defined boundaries between each party (boundary work). Finally,
37 there should be a coordinated approach to activities to ensure each party knows
38 what they are responsible for (cross-domain orchestration).
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46 *Front stage and back stage regions:* Goffman's (1990) theory makes an interesting
47 distinction to how co-production work is presented to front stage and back stage
48 audiences. Where the front-stage external audience receive a performance which
49 makes clear that the project maintains and embodies certain standards. The back
50 stage is reserved for insiders involved in the project where the 'performance' is
51 deliberately contradicted.
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55 *Communities of practice:* The final approach proposed by Wenger, McDermott, and
56 Snyder (2002) (Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder 2002) deviates slightly from the
57 other approaches. This approach is defined by individuals, or groups of people from
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3 different backgrounds coming together, as they share a passion about a particular
4 topic and can deepen their knowledge and experience by continually interacting
5 with each other. This approach is also more empirical in nature and focuses on
6 shared learning and experience from each party which can contribute to the project.
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10 Whilst the theoretical approaches outlined above provide a useful guide to
11 conducting co-production work, it can be difficult to adhere to any one approach.
12 However, evidence has shown that when this happens it can be really effective
13 (Sherman et al. 2015). For example, the UK Restorative Justice Trials involved
14 embedding researchers into police stations in London and Northumbria. The
15 researchers worked day to day with the police officers that were delivering the
16 interventions and were situated within the same offices in police stations with the
17 police officers. Team meetings and every aspect of the work was discussed and
18 decided together. This enabled shared learning on moving the project forward.
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23 **Conclusions**

24 With the cuts in public services in the UK and the need for more impact, as well as
25 the difficulties in recruiting practitioners and participants to research projects we, as
26 academics, need to do more. We argue that by working WITH practitioners from an
27 early stage in co-production work could be beneficial. Whilst some may argue that
28 academics and practitioners come from different worlds, when academics climb
29 down from the tower these differences are often negligible. By working together and
30 drawing on each party's knowledge and experience it is possible to deliver services
31 which are more translational into real world practice (Minkler and Wallerstein 2011;
32 Cooke et al. 2015; Graham and Tetroe 2007). Whilst there are many challenges in co-
33 producing research in the criminal justice system, when it does happen the results
34 can be particularly illuminating (Sherman et al, 2007).
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41 Furthermore, by examining what the primary outcome of interest is to those that
42 work in the field rather than what funding agencies tell us we must use, we may
43 engage in a more co-productive way that enables everyone to achieve what they
44 need. Moreover more work is needed to see how this kind of approach can be
45 achieved both in the UK and internationally.
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48 **Conflicts of interest**

49 The authors have no conflict of interest.
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