

# Chapter 2

## Doing Research on, for and with Police in Canada and Switzerland: Practical and Methodological Insights



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### 1 Introduction

The social sciences, namely psychology, sociology, public administration and criminology, explore the police institution from various perspectives. Each discipline has its own area of expertise and provides complementary knowledge. The sociological study of the police, much older than criminology, is characterised by two streams, although the boundaries are permeable: the sociology *of* the police and the sociology *for* the police (Manning, 2005). The former studies the police as a profession and organisation, mainly questioning its functioning. While the latter, in which criminology is mainly integrated, promotes the analysis of the police for the purpose of improving and perfecting its practices and policies (Holdaway, 2019; Manning, 2005).

However, in some countries, criminology, as a social science, remains a fragile field of research and needs more recognition compared to hard sciences like forensic science or engineering, whose contributions to police practices are already well established (Weisburd & Neyroud, 2011). Nevertheless, as police science flourishes, partnerships between research and practice become increasingly common (Rojek et al., 2012b). As the links between research and practice strengthen, a third form of study is emerging—research *with* the police—in which both entities seek to work together (Rojek et al., 2012b). Whether initiated by academics, policymakers or police chiefs, scientific research on, for or with the police pursues various goals and dynamics. These strategies follow the guidance of evidence-based policing and translational criminology, where the goal is to improve police practices through

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academic research, along with more standard models of policing influenced mainly by direct experience, the application of rules and procedures and the production of justice (Kenyon et al., 2022).

This chapter draws on the authors' experience as criminologists and researchers working on policing issues in Switzerland and Canada. The aim of this contribution is to highlight specific research stages or aspects identified as crucial or sensitive based on our experiences with research conducted on, for and with the police. The first author (Burkhardt) is a Research fellow at the School of Criminal Justice of the University of Lausanne since 2014. She has been involved in several policing-related research projects, including the impact of police visibility on fear of crime. For example, she led a longitudinal study to assess whether increasing police visibility by extending foot patrols had any influence on the level of fear of crime among people living in different neighbourhoods in a middle-size city in Switzerland (Burkhardt, [forthcoming](#)). The second author (Boivin) is Associate Professor at the School of Criminology of the Université de Montréal since 2012; prior to his academic career, he was a strategic advisor at the Montreal Police Services for almost five years. He has collaborated with police organisations on many projects, including the body-worn camera project that is discussed in this chapter and an on-going longitudinal study of police careers.

This chapter is structured into five parts. After a brief introduction to criminological research in the police environment, different ways of understanding a partnership between practice and research are discussed. Access to the field is then addressed, focusing on requests for permission and the social acceptance of the researcher. Following an overview of the methods commonly used in police research, challenges (i.e. administrative, methodological, ethical and emotional) are presented. The chapter closes with suggestions and avenues for reflection formulated to guide young scholars conducting applied research in the police field.

## **2 Criminological Research on Policing: As Rich as Challenging**

Since the mid-twentieth century, criminological researchers have been interested in studying different aspects of the police profession. According to Greene (2014), early studies focused on the functioning of police services from an organisational and public administrative perspective, followed by research on police cultures and police officers' interactions with the public. Later, particular attention was paid to policing approaches, including community policing, problem-solving policing, hot-spot policing and intelligence-led policing. While the research was shaped by a critical approach, a new tradition known as applied police research emerged in the 1970s and aimed 'to develop theories, frameworks and/or empirical evidence to inform and support policing policy and practice' (Cockbain & Knutsson, 2014, p. 2).

Unlike medicine, criminal justice practices have often not been based on robust scientific evidence (Welsh & Farrington, 2001). But since the late 1990s, a stream of research has promoted so-called evidence-based approaches to determining the effectiveness of crime prevention programmes, including police strategies (Sherman et al., 1998). Beyond the search for scientific evidence about policing, this approach encouraged producing and disseminating knowledge. In that regard, the police profession has raised and continues to raise a wide range of issues for researchers. However, several authors criticised the evidence-based current since it focuses to a large extent on measuring the performance of police interventions and promotes methodological standards that are too high to be applied in policing (Mitchell & Huey, 2019).

In a cross-sectional study of the police literature review, Wu et al. (2018) note that in 2014, 32% of the publications listed dealt with police strategies, 24% with police organisation, 18% with attitudes and behaviours, 11% with accountability and misconduct, 8% with citizen satisfaction and 5% with measurement issues. In that regard, criminological research produces knowledge by adopting a broad, interdisciplinary view of a situation, taking two primary forms. On the one hand, it may be new information that the stakeholders have not considered. On the other hand, even if the results do not provide fundamentally new knowledge, they provide empirical support that can be useful, especially for future decision-making. The involvement of a third party – in this case, academia – can facilitate accountability and transparency in policing.

Despite a strong interest in policing, it should be noted that the relationship between police and research has not always been comfortable. The divergent and sometimes antagonistic imperatives, objectives and cultures of the police and academia have led to tensions between the two worlds, whether organisational, cultural or interpersonal (Dawson & Williams, 2009; Goode & Lumsden, 2018). Researchers are perceived as being too academic, not speaking the same language, having production times that do not match the pace of police work, or conducting their research from an ivory tower far removed from the reality of the field. Conversely, researchers may perceive that police officers do not pay enough attention to theory, prefer quick research and do not know how to apply research results (Dawson & Williams, 2009).

These contrasting views have shaped the idea that a partnership between these two entities is complex, if not impossible, or only beneficial to science, describing the research–police relationship as a ‘dialogue of the deaf’ (Bradley & Nixon, 2009; Macdonald, 1987, p. 1). Additionally, memories of the somewhat critical currents towards the police remain in people’s minds and may present another obstacle to implementing partnerships (Engel & Whalen, 2010; Bradley & Nixon, 2009). Nevertheless, there is a growing willingness to combine research and practice and integrate research findings into practice. Science should be seen as an additional resource to be used by the police, providing information complementary to field experience (Sherman, 2015).

### 3 Implementing a Practice–Research Partnership: Different Ways of Approaching It

Bridging the gap between practice and research is increasingly encouraged, mainly under the impetus of the academic community (Grieco et al., 2014). The literature discusses several modalities and types of police–academia partnerships, ranging from the researcher’s role to the research’s impact. These aspects vary from one partnership to another and can influence the relationship and its success between the stakeholders. Based on our experience, the partnership is discussed from three perspectives: the researcher’s position, the level of stakeholders’ involvement and project funding.

#### 3.1 *Position of the Researcher*

The researcher’s position refers mainly to where the researcher works. The most common affiliation is to a university or research institute. As research centres, universities produce invaluable theoretical and empirical knowledge. However, there are other models where employment is split between academia and a police organisation, or the researcher may join the police organisation full-time. These different possibilities are detailed below.

- (i) *Academic researcher*: The researcher is commissioned for a specific project to collect and analyse data, write a report, and present the findings (Braga, 2013). Thus, the researcher is an outsider to the police, and this external position allows the researcher to maintain objectivity. However, academic researchers may miss some of the reality on the ground and local specificities. Indeed, to be relevant and valuable, science must respond to the priorities set by the police and the problems they encounter daily (Weisburd & Neyroud, 2011).
- (ii) *Embedded researcher*: A researcher with civilian status can be contracted within a police organisation to carry out research activities in what Brown (1996, cited by Dawson & Williams, 2009) refers to as ‘inside outsiders’ or, according to Braga (2013), ‘embedded criminologists’ (a term coined by Petersilia, 2008). The embedded criminologist may also have a parallel affiliation with a university (Braga & Davis, 2014). Probably under the impetus of the evidence-based policing movement, more police organisations or police academies employ researchers or create internal research units. An insider familiar with the system would be better able to use the appropriate channels to communicate and disseminate relevant information more widely, whether in a meeting or a coffee break (Braga, 2013; Lum et al., 2012). Thus, the individual is better able to apply scientific knowledge to practice. Knowing the police environment can also enhance the researcher’s credibility (Braga & Davis, 2014). However, if the researcher joins the police organisation, there is

a risk of losing scientific objectivity or neutrality by becoming immersed in the police culture (Innes & Everett, 2008), although this assumption is not shared by all (Engel & Whalen, 2010; Braga, 2013). Regardless, it is essential to put safeguards in place, such as seeking an outside perspective (Braga, 2013).

- (iii) *Pracademics*: Police officers with a degree and research background (Willis, 2016; Santos & Santos, 2019), enabling them to liaise with external researchers, conduct research, and disseminate scientific research knowledge within the police organisation (Willis, 2016). Although Willis (2016) highlights the value of pracademics, he remains sceptical about certain aspects. Notably, he mentions the risk of reducing the use of academic researchers and weakening scientific objectivity given the highly hierarchical, even militarised, structure of police organisations. A compromise would be a combination of academic researchers and pracademics to pool the knowledge and skills of both worlds (Willis, 2016).

All three positions are observed in Canada and Switzerland, although the researcher as an external partner is the most common. While this position favours the researcher's freedom and scientific objectivity, it perpetuates a common criticism: researchers are too far removed from the reality of police work. Moreover, our experience shows that external researchers' work is frequently limited to the task assigned. The findings are the subject of a report, without always having the opportunity to present them or discuss them with a broader police audience than the main interlocutor. Thus, there is a lack of visibility and dissemination of the knowledge produced within the police organisation, which hinders its assimilation by practitioners.

Although this approach is not unanimous, some Swiss and Canadian police services and police academies are gradually opening their doors to academics. In this respect, the *Centre de recherche et de développement stratégique* of the *École nationale de police du Québec* (a research division within the police academy), created in 2012, plays a central role in police knowledge for the Quebec police services and is responsible for training police officers for the entire territory of Quebec. It independently initiates and carries out analysis projects, responds to requests from police organisations or third parties and participates in external collaborations. There is a dual configuration in that the centre includes embedded criminologists but also relies on external researchers. Another example is the cantonal police of Basel-Stadt (Switzerland), which established a specialised research unit in 2018. This unit is responsible for making available scientific literature results and researching topics of interest to the police organisation (Gut, 2020).

Finally, the role of pracademic is one that we have encountered least in our experience. Although many people with both police and academic backgrounds work in police organisations, they are not necessarily 'double hatted'; research work is rarely included in their job description. However, this does not mean they will not use their scientific knowledge and skills, especially in mediating roles between the police and the academic world. For example, the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police has a Research advisory committee that includes pracademics from several

police organisations. Their role is to facilitate collaboration by bringing the two worlds together and ensuring that practices are consistent, at least partly, with the best practices put forward by research. Notably, participating in such projects is primarily a matter of personal choice and interest, as research training in police organisations remains marginal compared to other more ‘immediate’ knowledge, such as law.

### **3.2 *Level of Involvement***

This section discusses the stakeholders’ different levels of proximity and involvement across academia and police in the partnership. In their study, Rojek et al. (2012b) identify the following three forms of partnership: (i) *cooperation*: characterised by more informal and short-term exchanges, such as sharing advice and making data available to researchers; (ii) *coordination*: a more formalised relationship leading to a concrete project; the partnership is terminated at the end of the project; and (iii) *collaboration*: the most formalised and robust level of partnership. Projects are multiplying, and both parties are involved, working together and co-producing the study. There is a shift from doing research on or for the police to doing research with the police.

Throughout our careers, we were often involved in projects based on cooperation or coordination with a police organisation, with collaborations being less common (Rojek et al., 2012b). Several factors determine the level of stakeholder involvement. Financial and human resources are often the main reasons for little or no involvement in a partnership.

The willingness to participate also depends on the police organisation’s interest and expectations of science (Santos & Santos, 2019). A police organisation that does not see the benefits of such a partnership, or is afraid of the results, will not waste its time and money on it. On the other hand, the purpose of the partnership or research is another critical parameter. However, it is true that collaborations are more challenging to set up and often rely on a relationship of trust built over time (Engel & Whalen, 2010; Goode & Lumsden, 2018). Turnover within the police organisation can present an obstacle to building a relationship of trust, as these relationships – whether on the academic or police side – are more about the person than the institution. It is often necessary to build a relationship every time there is a new decisionmaker in place (Engel & Whalen, 2010).

### **3.3 *Funding of the Research Work***

In this section, we return to the topic of research funding in more detail, distinguishing between three situations: (i) *university or research institute funding*: research is funded by the university or research institute, not external resources; (ii) *external*

*organisation funding*: the police or other organisation funds all or part of the project costs based on a mandate or contract; and (iii) *subsidy funding*: several public and private organisations or foundations provide research grants.

While all situations have pros and cons, one dilemma is particularly important for policing researchers. Funding means that it is possible to conduct the project, which is often appealing to the researcher, but often comes with compromises, for example, control over the final product. It is up to the researcher to set the necessary limits at the project's onset to preserve scientific freedom and prevent censoring or changing aspects of the work without due justification, a situation that is not frequent when projects are funded by universities, research institutes or funding agencies. As an example, the second author of this chapter received a research mandate from the political entity that supervised a police organisation in Quebec. Although it was a constant struggle, partly because the police organisation wanted to be informed of the results before the political body, it was possible to maintain a comfortable distance because due dates were negotiated before any research was conducted. Still, it was only possible to conduct the project if the researchers agreed to several conditions.

## **4 Initiating Police Fieldwork: Gaining Access, Trust and Acceptance**

One of the first stages of a study is to gain access to the field of investigation. While the police do not need the scientific community to carry out their primary duties, scholars need the police to conduct studies (Engel & Whalen, 2010). However, access to this field is not always straightforward, and many issues are at stake. In this section, we discuss access to the field from the perspective of requests for authorisation and the social acceptance of the researcher within the police organisation.

### ***4.1 Official Approval Processes***

Authorisations depend primarily on what the researcher needs and what he or she intends to do with it. For example, there may be approval procedures to obtain access to data, administer a survey to police officers, conduct an observation during a police patrol, implement a new strategy or obtain approval from an ethics committee to conduct the study. While some authorisations are strictly related to the police organisation, others involve external institutions. Some issues related to approvals are illustrated with three examples drawn from our experience.

The first example is taken from a Swiss study evaluating a police strategy that the first author managed. Regarding ethics, a summary procedure took place during the

Scientific Committee review for grant approval. Nevertheless, the affiliated academic institution did not have a standard protocol for ethical approvals for non-human experiments at the time the study was launched. However, other avenues of approval were required, such as political approval and cooperation with the residents' registration office to survey the public's perception of security. To do this, the first author had to send a note to the municipality, followed by a request to the residents' registration office and, finally, a request for a service to obtain the data from the residents' registration office. In terms of time, four months elapsed between the first steps and the receipt of the data. Undeniably, the cumbersome nature of the procedures and exchanges between the different stakeholders slowed the project's progress.

In Canada, the process is dual. For a study about the impact of curfews related to the COVID-19 pandemic on crime in Montreal that the second author managed, researchers first had to contact the police organisation to learn what data could be shared with them. Then, they had to inform their university ethical board about the data they would request from the police organisation. They also had to complete a formal request for cooperation from the police organisation. All researchers had to be 'cleared' by the police organisation before any data could be shared, which took about six months. At the same time, the university granted an ethics certificate stating that researchers could use the data requested without risk to the persons involved or the researchers themselves. After those processes, the data extraction could begin at the police organisation. Including expected logistics back-and-forth between the police organisation and the research team (e.g. identifying the format of the data and the procedures to acquire it), the whole process took about a year.

The process can be nevertheless considered relatively short because no human participant was solicited for that project; longer delays from both the police organisation and the university ethics board should be expected when interviews with police officers or nominal information are requested. For example, for another study involving body-worn cameras, the researchers requested access to actual footage from the cameras, which implied that they would see individuals (and, in some cases, where they lived) without them agreeing to it because, obviously, it was not possible to get their informed consent prior to the recording. While the police organisation wanted to grant access to the footage and quickly found a practical way to do it, the university ethics board wanted to ensure that the researchers were protected and likely free from potential lawsuits before they granted approval. The board requested the opinion of lawyers responsible for access to information in Quebec, which usually takes at least an additional six months to get. Because the project was intended to last for a year, that was not realistic, and the researchers appealed that decision. The ethics board had already agreed to other parts of the project – a population survey and interviews with police officers – a process that lasted about two months. The ethics board collaborated with the researchers to find a rapid solution, and access was granted after an additional nine months.

These three examples highlight the importance of considering these aspects when designing the research protocol and timeline. The researcher needs to be aware of all these administrative procedures and the time needed to complete them.



As noted above, having a person within the police organisation sensitive to these parameters could help expedite the process in some cases. Ethical approaches to the university with which the researcher is affiliated may also add to the process and slow the project.

## ***4.2 Acceptance of the Researchers***

According to Brown (2014), one of the keys to successful scientific research in policing is the social acceptance of the researcher by the police. This can be just as important as the methodology used.

In an institution such as the police, social acceptance occurs on two levels. First and foremost, the approval of senior management is a prerequisite for obtaining permission to conduct research within a police organisation. However, Brown (2014) points out that this acceptance does not mean that the researcher and the study have the support of the police officers who may be involved in the study (e.g. by implementing a strategy or participating in interviews). The appreciation of an individual can be based on many factors (see Brown, 2014). Some recommendations are made based on our experience.

First, knowing how to communicate with the police is crucial. The researcher should avoid giving the impression that he or she is teaching the police how to do their job, giving them orders or ‘acting like the smartest person in the room’ by pouring out all his or her knowledge (Engel & Whalen, 2010, p. 375; Grieco et al., 2014). Such behaviours risk alienating interlocutors and increasing their potential reticence towards academics and science. The researcher must, therefore, adopt a humble attitude, sharing his or her expertise as a complementary resource to the police. Indeed, replacing police expertise with science is a fear expressed by police officers in a Swiss study (Schucany, 2023). It is also essential to explain to the police officers, in detail, and without intermediaries, what is at stake and what the research will produce so that they can see the sense and usefulness of this approach and then fully engage with it (Burkhardt, forthcoming). They may not be immediately convinced and may try to confront the researcher about the relevance and added value of the project. The pitch for the project should be based on facts and concrete examples and highlight the benefits for the police organisation of being part of the project. In this way, a proposal that presents a win–win situation is more likely to be well received.

Trust, legitimacy and credibility take time to ‘earn’, and the researcher may be tested or have their skills and knowledge questioned repeatedly (Engel & Whalen, 2010). The first author still remembers her first crucial meeting with several police representatives. As a young researcher, it was an uncomfortable moment where the lack of experience enhanced the questioning of skills. Junior researchers should be prepared, perhaps by a mentor, to face these situations to avoid being intimidated and overwhelmed.

The more experience and knowledge a researcher gains in the field, the more coping tools he or she will have to deal with these situations and the easier it will be to be accepted (Brown, 2014). Social acceptance is also a matter of anecdotes that have little to do with the project. For example, the second author regularly hears that he has asked to be tasered in various contexts other than use-of-force research. This experience has, in some ways, strengthened the relationship between the researcher and the police community.

Other aspects may seem superficial at first glance but are nonetheless noteworthy, sometimes linked to institutional and local culture. In Switzerland, for example, it is essential to mention the rank of a police officer, especially at the command level, as a sign of respect when addressing him or her, whether in writing or orally. However, a certain distance is necessary since the researcher is not one of them. So, one should say ‘Good morning, Mr Captain’ and not ‘Good morning, my Captain’ (an expression that is used among police officers). The dress code is another aspect to which attention should be paid. As in any field, it is vital to be appropriately dressed, especially for important meetings. For example, when the first author visited the Quebec National Police Academy, the second author, fortunately, informed her that jeans were not acceptable on the premises.

These various points show that communication, respect and good faith are critical factors for successful research (Macqueen & Bradford, 2017). It is essential to adapt to the specificities of the field and the population being studied, including their habits and customs. The authors advise more novice researchers to ask their mentor or gatekeeper about possible customs.

## **5 Methods Used in Police Research: A Brief Overview**

Research can be designed using different methodologies and data collection techniques. Research methods are often divided into two categories: quantitative and qualitative methods. A study may also use a mixed methods design, combining several approaches. After reviewing these different aspects, we briefly discuss evaluative research in policing.

### ***5.1 Quantitative, Qualitative and Mixed Methods***

Regarding quantitative methods, police research relies mainly on surveys and official data such as police statistics. Qualitative methods are mainly interviews and observation (Manning, 2005), and to a lesser extent, focus groups, ethnography or case studies (Copes et al., 2011). The researcher can also use a combination of these methods if one cannot cover what needs to be studied or if it involves multiple facets (Fortin, 2010). As Greene (2014, p. 203) stresses ‘Each [method] brings a potential

perspective to the research question, which in turn shapes the ways in which these questions are pursued'. Thus, methodological selection is critical.

Numerous studies reveal that quantitative research is predominant in criminology and criminal justice research, with qualitative and mixed methods under-represented (Jenkins, 2015; Smith, 2014; Crow & Smykla, 2013). However, several researchers stress the importance of promoting the use of qualitative methods alongside quantitative approaches. These methods are complementary, allowing to explore different aspects of the object studied (Koziarski & Huey, 2021). For example, while quantitative methods determine programme effectiveness, qualitative methods help understand the mechanisms leading to outcomes (Sidebottom & Tilley, 2020). These methods can also increase the external validity of the research (Engel & Whalen, 2010) and even strengthen the relationship between academics and practitioners (Jenkins, 2015).

We have been more involved in quantitative research based on analysing police statistics or police or public survey data. These methods appear less demanding on police organisations regarding their required time and resources. Furthermore, based on our experience, we believe that police officers as well as non-researchers are less receptive to qualitative research findings or are less likely to value them. Numbers and statistical analysis expressions such as 'multinomial logistic regression' seem more credible than verbatim interviews. However, in recent years, we have increasingly supplemented our research protocols with qualitative approaches to conducting research on and with the police. Although quantitative methods allow large amounts of data to be collected quickly, qualitative approaches offer the advantage of allowing more in-depth exploration.

In the analysis of police data, we find that the primary data, such as the nature, time, location and degree of seriousness of the offences recorded by the police, are insufficient to allow a proper interpretation of the data and a fuller understanding of the phenomena. It is equally important to analyse the text describing how the crime happened and how the police officers intervened. We also increasingly prefer using interviews, sometimes combined with a survey. For example, in parallel with a statistical analysis of the impact of COVID-19 on crime, the second author wanted to know the impact on police practice that was not captured by official statistics by conducting interviews with police officers who experienced both periods, before and after the pandemic. Finally, we believe that a privileged relationship between a researcher and practitioners, such as an embedded criminologist, is conducive to using more qualitative or mixed methods. By encouraging informal exchanges, observations, interviews or focus groups, new indicators can be developed, and more detailed knowledge generated.

## **5.2 *Evaluation Studies and Experimental Designs***

In addition to the distinction between quantitative and qualitative approaches, an important methodological aspect of police research relates to evaluative studies. Using experiments or quasi-experimental designs, these studies are mainly used to measure the impact of police intervention (see Sherman et al., 1998; Farrington et al., 2020). However, the methodological rigour required by experimental protocols is often not feasible in the social context. For example, when evaluating a police intervention, the first author's intention was to use a pre-/post-test design with a control group. However, such a methodology was ethically and legally unacceptable for the police organisation since both areas under study faced the same difficulties, and their respective populations had reached a breaking point. Thus, the police strategy was implemented in both sites. It is, therefore, sometimes necessary to find a compromise to produce valuable intelligence for the police using a more flexible and realistic methodology (Eck, 2002; Cockbain & Knutsson, 2014).

## **6 *Doing Applied Police Research: Some Key Focus and Practical Guidance***

Although the methodological design of the research is carefully considered and developed jointly by researchers and police representatives, issues and challenges can still arise. From developing the research plan to disseminating the results, we reflect herein on the stages of the research process and share practical advice based on our experience.

### **6.1 *Research Design, Balancing Academic and Police Interests***

Whether it is a matter of mission, objectives or timing, the interests of academia and the police do not always align and may even be in conflict; hence, the importance of building partnerships to find common ground.

Crime trends mainly guide police missions and strategies. Logically, applied police research also depends on the evolution of the security and crime in the area studied. On the one hand, security decisions take precedence over scientific research objectives, both from methodological and evaluative points of view. Scientific research can, therefore, only adapt to a criminogenic context. In a Swiss study evaluating a police strategy that the first author managed, a 'crisis' situation arose in the hotspots studied just before the start of the first evaluation phase. The police had to respond overnight by significantly increasing their presence, making it impossible to maintain the strategy initially planned for the study. As a result, it was necessary to wait until the situation in these two neighbourhoods had more or less normalised

before the study could be launched. On the other hand, the usefulness of a police operation might change if the strategy is no longer appropriate to the current criminogenic situation. Special attention should also be paid to the development of the environment in the immediate or adjacent vicinity of the study area. Indeed, police activity in an area close to the study site may impact the latter. Given the normal mobility of certain criminals, the possibility of a temporary displacement of a criminogenic phenomenon, for example, following a simultaneous police operation in a nearby area, should not be overlooked.

In that regard, the evolution of the environment to be analysed can have various effects on the study, such as the research agenda, the planned methodology and the work schedule of all those involved (including the police officers). On the one hand, it is essential to monitor the evolution of the situation – including the security, criminogenic, political and media context – before, during and after the study and to adapt the methodology in case of evolution (Vito & Higgins, 2014). On the other hand, we advocate providing backup plans for the research design in the form of reserved decisions (Burkhardt, forthcoming). This will make it easier to adapt the strategy in case of unexpected environmental changes. For example, as part of the implementation of a strategy, the first author had defined different levels of police visibility depending on how the crime context would develop in the days or weeks prior to implementation.

On the other hand, the scientific calendar and the police calendar rarely run at the same pace. While scientists need a certain amount of time to collect, analyse and interpret information, the police require (almost) immediate results. Particular attention can be paid to some research parameters to improve the alignment of the two agendas, such as the design of the research and its objectives, as well as the closeness between the stakeholders. For example, a study with a time horizon of several years does not seem conducive to fulfilling this immediacy requirement. A shorter format would, therefore, be preferable – if possible and by the objectives – to speed up the production of valuable results for the police. However, longitudinal studies, including experiments, tend to be long term. We encourage the reporting of results in multi-stages to overcome this disadvantage. For example, establishing a steering committee within the police organisation would benefit long-term research. In addition, the occasional presence of the researcher within the police organisation could facilitate the regular dissemination of information through occasional and largely informal presentations.

## ***6.2 Research Implementation Involving Police Officers at an Early Stage***

Besides the researcher's social acceptance, communication shortcomings can affect research success (Macqueen & Bradford, 2017). In an organisation mainly based on a robust hierarchical system, it can be assumed that implementation will be

successful by relying on the support of senior management and the power of the chain of command. However, relying on information to be passed down the chain of command runs the risk of simply giving an order without explaining the purpose and objectives of the process. Dialogue should occur with all levels of the hierarchy, especially with the police officers who are active participants in the research. It is essential to explain that the research is not intended to criticise the work of the police officers but rather to contribute to improving practices and, if necessary, to suggest ways to improve them. Moreover, this contextualising (and simultaneously trust-building) stage is critical in police culture to avoid the researcher being perceived as an outsider trying to impose a way of doing things.

When developing a police intervention to be evaluated by the first author, front-line police officers were invited to participate in the reflection on the strategy once the initial orientations had been defined. Discussions with them, both in formal meetings and on patrol, allowed both a better explanation of how this project came about and a refinement of our strategy. Unlike command staff, frontline police officers contact the public daily. Moreover, in this case, the need to review the intensity of the strategy became apparent by talking to frontline police officers working in the neighbourhoods studied.

It is, therefore, crucial to involve police officers, regardless of their hierarchical rank, in the reflection and construction of research. Grieco et al. (2014) observe that line managers tend to be more involved in the preparation of projects than in their implementation. On the other hand, supervisors of fieldworkers are more present in the implementation of projects than in the preparation phase. In our opinion, front-line staff will accept exogenous interaction and the academic view of their daily tasks the sooner they have assimilated the motivations and objectives of the approach. It should not be forgotten that to refine and improve the research, police knowledge and experience are indispensable.

### ***6.3 Research Management, Considering the Researcher's Exposure***

While the role and objectivity of the researcher have been widely discussed in the literature, less attention has been paid to the researcher's experience of interacting with the object or field of study. Sometimes, however, a researcher may face unpleasant information or situations.

When working with a police organisation, the researcher sees, reads and hears information unknown to the general public. Facts are more concrete in conversations with police officers or reading reports of investigations than in the literature or documentary films. Dealing with this type of information can be complex, especially if it involves a degree of proximity to the researcher. For example, facts that occurred in the researcher's hometown or involve people he or she knows can prove to be sensitive topics. It can also be challenging to handle evidence or material.

Reflecting on her research into child sex trafficking and the analysis of sensitive materials, Cockbain (2014, p. 29) notes that she was 'unprepared for how emotionally, mentally, and physically draining this would be' and highlights the need to develop coping strategies.

Policing and crime are sensitive and controversial topics that often elicit strong opinions. The interest of the community, media or politicians can easily be aroused. As part of a police strategy evaluation, residents of the neighbourhoods studied were invited to take part in a survey on perceptions of safety. Participants were given the opportunity to contact the researcher for further clarification. While some calls were positive because the caller wanted to obtain or provide more information, others were about people's complaints against politicians and the police. Although the first author tried to convey her impartial and independent role from the police, some harsh words were painful to hear. Besides complaints, reports of victimisation are another type of sensitive call where it is never easy to handle people's suffering.

Our experience has taught us that it is essential for a researcher to step back from the research field and the situations encountered and not be consumed by them. Reflecting on one's position as a researcher and how one feels about the object studied can be essential. However, the researcher should try to develop his/her techniques (e.g. sharing his/her feelings with colleagues and taking care not to violate the duty of discretion and confidentiality).

#### ***6.4 Research Findings, Translating Research Into Practice***

The dissemination and popularisation of knowledge, its translation and applicability on the ground, and mechanisms to stimulate research in everyday policing are all part of what is known as translational criminology (Lum & Koper, 2017; The George Mason Police Research Group with David Weisburd, 2022). Although interest in research and scientific evidence is growing, many researchers agree that the findings of police research still have little impact on practice (Fyfe & Wilson, 2012; Bullock & Tilley, 2009), as police organisations do not always know how to use the findings and put them into practice.

Several parameters influence how research knowledge is received and used in practice. Nutley et al. (2007) mention four general elements: the nature of the research, the characteristics of the potential users, the linkages between research and its user communities, and the context in which the knowledge will be used. In particular, police researchers should remember that for various reasons, police officers rarely use academic journals, relying more on professional journals, professional associations and networks, or knowledge shared by colleagues or other police forces (Rojek et al., 2012a). Academic researchers should remember not to produce publications for academics if they aim to have an impact on practices (Bratton, 2006). As a consequence, the first publication made by the second author of this chapter and his research team for the body-worn camera project was a more

approachable report instead of a journal article that police officers were unlikely to consult.

Even if knowledge integration is left to strategic and operational units, researchers can already make concrete recommendations on how their findings can inform policy and be translated into practice (Lum & Koper, 2017; Dawson & Williams, 2009; Grieco et al., 2014) or even guide the organisation in implementing these findings (Engel & Whalen, 2010). Going beyond, merely reporting findings helps to highlight the practical benefits of research, particularly in research aimed at improving policing practice.

### ***6.5 Research Dissemination, Establishing the Conditions for Publication***

Dissemination makes the findings of research known and spreads information more widely. Several vectors can be used, but the most traditional for academics is publication in a peer-reviewed journal. Moreover, recognition within the scientific community is mainly based on publishing articles in journals with a high impact factor, which creates a certain pressure to publish, especially for young researchers. The publication is perceived as one of the last stages in the research process. While the researcher usually has much freedom if the university or a grant funds the study, this step can be more difficult in studies conducted with the police or using police data. The research framework and the use of results are commonly regulated by contract. Thus, publications or the terms of publication may have to be the subject of negotiation and compromise.

The first question is whether publication is allowed. Sometimes the police organisation does not want to disclose the findings report because of the sensitivity of the subject matter, the confidentiality of the data used or concerns about potential negative repercussions for the organisation (Brown, 2014). In this case, the researcher will only be able to reference the study in his or her publication list, which can be frustrating for young scholars. Therefore, it is essential to discuss this issue early in the research (Grieco et al., 2014) to avoid creating tensions once the research is completed. If dissemination is approved, the terms and conditions of dissemination will need to be defined. Stakeholders need to discuss whether the whole study can be made public or only certain parts and which channels will be used to communicate (report, article in a scientific/professional journal, conference, etc.). The level of detail of the information published is another point that needs to be addressed. For example, sometimes identifying the cities under study is not an option. In the past, the second author has been asked by the police to identify the city as a 'North American metropolis' rather than giving the name of the city concerned. As this change did not affect the usefulness of the results, the researchers agreed. More recently, a request bordered on the absurd. There was only one police equipment pilot project in the world during the period identified in the article. Hence, the name



of the city involved was evident to all. At the very least, not identifying the city could be misinterpreted (e.g. as an attempt to censor the research, which was not the case), and so the authors refused the change. The police quickly agreed.

Finally, there may be a delay of several months between the completion of the study and the publication of the findings. While the police organisation may seek to approve the final report, other factors external to the research may interfere with the study's publication, such as the political agenda. For example, the second author leads a research team working on the impact of body-worn cameras on police–population relations in Quebec (Service de police de la Ville de Montréal, 2019). Given the highly political nature of this issue, it was requested at the beginning of the work that the report be published after the general election, which occurred towards the end of the work. The authors believed it was important to highlight these points, particularly for less experienced researchers, since the result can be the researcher losing control of the research product (Brown, 2014). Awareness of these challenges can be a key factor in their anticipation.

## 7 Conclusion

Whether research is conducted on, for or with the police, interacting with the police is essential. An overview of the different characteristics of police–research interactions or partnerships has been provided in this chapter. The perspectives presented, including the role of the researcher, the level of police involvement and funding possibilities, are neither exhaustive nor closed, as each partnership and each area of research have different, if not unique, dynamics. The differing and sometimes antagonistic imperatives, aims and cultures of the police and academia have long led to the idea that working together is complex, if not impossible, or only beneficial to academia. However, it is possible to move beyond the ‘dialogue of the deaf’ that has been used to describe the relationship between police and academia (Bradley & Nixon, 2009; Macdonald, 1987, p. 1), as demonstrated by existing applied research and the discussion in the previous section.

However, some reluctance remains, and access to the field of policing is sometimes difficult because it implies the ability of the police service to question itself. By opening up to researchers, the police accept that they may be questioned and need to accept an outside view of how they operate. Nevertheless, access to the field and the possibility of immersion in this environment is essential for the researcher to ‘see their world as they see it’ (Kennedy, 2014, p. 19). In addition to strict access to the field, a certain amount of perseverance is required, especially for young researchers, to build a relationship of trust and gain credibility and legitimacy with the police. To facilitate police research, it is necessary to consider the stakeholders’ particularities, the issues addressed and, more broadly, the security, political and media environment within which the research is taking place and is likely to develop. Indeed, a very diverse combination of knowledge and skills, including

methodological, ethnographic, political, media, management and community relations skills, is required for applied research in the policing environment (Kennedy, 2014).

Police science and applied research, as rich and challenging as they are, remain underexploited. There is a need to understand each other's competencies and resources and to valorise the contribution of both professions. In this way, it will be ensured that police science is perceived as an additional tool at the disposal of police organisations.

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