Article

University Researcher and Law Enforcement Collaboration: Lessons From a Study of Justice-Involved Persons With Suspected Mental Illness

International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology
2017, Vol. 61(5) 508–525

DOI: 10.1177/0306624X15599393
journals.sagepub.com/home/ijo
SAGE

Brett C. Burkhardt[1], Scott Akins[1], Jon Sassaman[2], Scott Jackson[3], Ken Elwer[4], Charles Lanfear[5], Mariana Amorim[1], and Katelyn Stevens[1]

Abstract

In 2012, heads of local law enforcement agencies in Benton County, Oregon, contacted researchers at Oregon State University to discuss a problem: a sharp rise in the number of contacts between police and suspects displaying symptoms of mental illness. This initial inquiry led to an ongoing collaborative examination of the nature, causes, and consequences of the rise in police contacts. In this article, the authors describe this collaboration between researchers and law enforcement officials from the perspective of both parties, situating it within the context of mental illness in the U.S. criminal justice system. The collaborators draw on firsthand experiences and prior collaborations to discuss the benefits of, challenges in, and recommendations for university–police research collaborations. Although such collaborations may pose challenges (related to relationship definition, data collection and analysis, outputs, and relationship maintenance), the potential benefits—for researchers and law enforcement agencies—are substantial.

[1]Oregon State University, Corvallis, USA
[2]Chief of Police, Corvallis Police Department, Corvallis, Oregon, USA.
[3]Sheriff, Benton County Sheriff's Office, Corvallis, Oregon, USA.
[4]Chief of Police, Philomath Police Department, Philomath, Oregon, USA.
[5]University of Washington, Seattle, Washington, USA.

Corresponding Author:
Brett C. Burkhardt, School of Public Policy, Oregon State University, 307 Fairbanks Hall, Corvallis, OR, 97331, USA.
Email: brett.burkhardt@oregonstate.edu

Keywords
collaborative research, police, mental health, problem-oriented policing, action research

In 2012, heads of local law enforcement in Benton County, Oregon, requested a meeting with researchers at Oregon State University (OSU) to discuss a problem: a sharp rise in the number of contacts between local law enforcement and persons with a suspected mental illness (PWSMI).[1] The increasing contacts triggered a variety of more specific concerns: the amount of resources consumed by these contacts, which often require major time commitments; the growing number of individuals whom police see on a repeated basis; the potential for these contacts to escalate due to police presence; and the general sense that, in many cases, police were simply not the appropriate response to individuals experiencing a mental health crisis.

Benton County is hardly alone in facing challenges related to justice-involved PWSMI. The deinstitutionalization movement begun in the 1960s resulted in PWSMI having more contact with law enforcement in the community and ultimately greater exposure to criminal punishment (Raphael & Stoll, 2013). U.S. prisons and jails now house a vast number of persons with mental illness. According to a 2006 report, more than half of state inmates (56%, or 705,600) and jail inmates (64%, or 479,900) in the United States had a mental problem, defined as a recent history or current symptoms of a mental illness (James & Glaze, 2006). Police play a critical role when it comes to PWSMI in the criminal justice system. As the point of first contact, law enforcement officers serve as gatekeepers into the justice system (Bittner, 1967; Lamb, Weinberger, & DeCuir, 2002). As such, approaches to the crisis of mental illness in the justice system must involve police officers.

In response to the growing exposure of PWSMI to the justice system nationally, and the particular manifestation locally, Benton County law enforcement agencies began a research collaboration seeking to address the increased rate of contacts between police and PWSMI. Researchers and graduate students at OSU worked with law enforcement to define the problem locally, understand its origins, and generate policy recommendations based on an evaluation of extent literature and analysis of data collected in Benton County. This article presents firsthand experiences in this collaboration—from the perspective of the researchers and law enforcement officials—and uses them to discuss some of the potential benefits of collaboration, likely challenges, and recommendations for overcoming hurdles.

Existing Research on Police–Researcher Collaborations

Researchers and police occupy very different worlds, and as a result, collaborations have been sparse and challenging. Historically, police have been reluctant to engage with academic researchers, a reluctance inspired in part by a tendency to do "hit and

run" research (Rosenbaum, 2010, p. 144), in which researchers criticize police practices from a distance and provide no added value (also see Bradley & Nixon, 2009; Tillyer et al., 2013). Some academic researchers have been reluctant to collaborate with police out of a concern that the research may be deemed to be "too applied" (Skogan, 2010, p. 130) and not valued by administrators for purposes of promotion and tenure (Buerger, 2010).

Yet, the amount of researcher–practitioner collaboration has increased over the years. Increased federal funding in the 1990s and 2000s—including the National Institute of Justice's Locally Initiated Research Partnership and the Department of Justice's Project Safe Neighborhoods—has made collaborations more financially feasible for both parties (Beal & Kerlikowske, 2010; Mock, 2010). Recent years have seen several journals devote space to collaborations between criminal justice practitioners and academic researchers (e.g., Childs & Potter, 2014; Fyfe & Wilson, 2012). And, although it remains a small fraction of all academic output on policing, the amount of published work coauthored by researchers and practitioners has increased in the past 10 years (Guillaume, Sidebottom, & Tilley, 2012). In addition, policing research is making its way into police departments. In a recent national survey of more than 800 law enforcement agencies, roughly three out of four reported using research "sometimes" (53%) or "very often" (24%) to inform their decisions (Rojek, Alpert, & Smith, 2012).

Much of the collaborative research is consistent with the action research paradigm (Brydon-Miller, Greenwood, & Maguire, 2003). Action research is characterized by a focus on real-world problems; attempts to gain knowledge that can be put into practice; broad participation, including researchers and practitioners; and continual revision and improvement (Tillyer et al., 2013; Wuestewald & Steinheider, 2009). It has been explicitly applied to researcher–police collaborations (e.g., Beal & Kerlikowske, 2010; Tillyer et al., 2013). In this context, stakeholders (e.g., police) collaborate in defining a research problem and in generating and interpreting data. The results of the research process, then, are applied in the field in a way that permits ongoing feedback from the stakeholders. The direct input from the stakeholders helps to ensure that the research speaks to real issues on the ground and that the stakeholders may apply the results of the research in their daily lives.

The collaboration below also follows principles of problem-oriented policing, an approach to police work that targets specific community problems and seeks measurable outcomes. The orientation was first laid out by Goldstein (1979), who noted that police administrations often spend too much energy on internal procedural reforms (e.g., staff professionalization and reorganization) and not enough time improving community safety and sentiment. Goldstein urged law enforcement agencies to carefully identify problems that recur in the local community and develop strategies, often involving tactics and partners from outside of law enforcement, to address them in meaningful and measurable ways. The approach is captured in the acronym SARA: Scan for problems in the community, Analyze the causes and consequences of those problems, Respond with some intervention, and Assess the efficacy of the response (Center for Problem-Oriented Policing, 2013; Goldstein, 1979; Reisig, 2011; Weisburd, Telep, Hinkle, & Eck, 2010). A recent meta-analysis of problem-oriented policing

evaluations documents that this approach is effective at reducing crime and disorder (Weisburd et al., 2010).

Problem-oriented policing lends itself to collaboration with researchers. This is particularly so in the analysis and assessment phases. Problem-oriented collaborations have the potential to benefit both parties (Cordner & White, 2010); practitioners gain useable knowledge about the diagnosis and treatment of a specific local problem and the researchers gain access to a research site and data that may further their academic research agenda. This is in contrast to the tradition of critical police studies, in which academics have historically stood at a distance and failed to provide any useable research for police (Bradley & Nixon, 2009). Thus, a problem-oriented collaboration, informed by action research, is likely to succeed because it offers a win-win scenario for police and their research partners (Cordner & White, 2010).

Policing and Persons With Mental Illness

One area ripe for collaboration is police contact with persons with suspected mental illness (Lurigio, 2012). Police are in frequent contact with PWSMI. One study of large U.S. jurisdictions (populations more than 100,000) found that 7% of police contacts involved persons thought to have a mental illness (Deane, Steadman, Borum, Veysey, & Morrissey, 1999). High rates of contact can be attributed to various factors, including the possibility of disruptive behavior that is symptomatic of an untreated disorder, high rates of substance use, and high rates of homelessness among persons with mental illness (James & Glaze, 2006; Prins & Draper, 2009).

These contacts are problematic for a number of reasons. Police–PWSMI contacts often require officers to spend more time on the scene, especially if the situation calls for a person to be taken into custody for a mental health evaluation (Charette, Crocker, & Billette, 2014; Hoover, 2007). Law enforcement officers often feel ill-equipped to handle chronic mental health problems (Ruiz, 2004), and high rates of co-occurring disorders (i.e., substance abuse) make treatment especially difficult (Prins & Draper, 2009; White, Goldkamp, & Campbell, 2006). Some studies have found that PWSMI are more likely to resist arrest (Mulvey & White, 2014; Novak & Engel, 2005). This behavior may in turn lead to increased use of force by police (Mulvey & White, 2014), although evidence on this is not consistent (Johnson, 2011; Mulvey & White, 2014). Overall, there is a concern about the "criminalization" of mental illness, wherein individuals are punished for nothing more than an unmanaged mental disorder (Abramson, 1972; Teplin, 1984), although more recent studies have failed to find evidence that PWSMI are arrested at higher rates than persons without a mental disorder once suspect behavior (e.g., suspect resistance) is taken into account (Engel & Silver, 2001; Novak & Engel, 2005).

This list of problems associated with police contacts with PWSMI is not meant to be exhaustive and is not meant to imply that these problems will be equally present in all communities. In fact, each community will have its own set of particular challenges related to justice-involved PWSMI (Reuland, Draper, & Norton, 2010). Similarly, there is no panacea that is appropriate for all communities. Following the

insights of problem-oriented policing, it behooves police to systematically assess the status quo and any intervention. This is where collaboration between law enforcement and researchers comes into play. Collaboration has the potential to improve the operation of police, spawn important research for academics, and improve the lives of justice-involved PWSMI. After introducing the case of collaboration in Benton County, we detail the stakeholders involved in such a collaboration, the benefits they might expect to receive, and challenges that will need to be overcome.

The Benton County Collaboration

The Benton County collaboration began in September 2012, when the heads of several local law enforcement agencies alerted researchers at OSU to a rise in contacts between police officers and suspects displaying symptoms of mental illness. Benton County, in western Oregon, is home to more than 80,000 residents. Its largest city, Corvallis, has more than 54,000 residents and is home to OSU, the state land grant institution. The county, and Corvallis in particular, have several amenities that make it hospitable to PWSMI, especially those who are dual diagnosis or homeless. The city has a major regional medical center that provides inpatient mental health treatment. Persons with mental illness from surrounding areas are brought to Corvallis for treatment, and anecdotal evidence suggests that many of them stay following release (see Akins, Burkhardt, Lanfear, Stevens, & Amorim, n.d.). As a relatively affluent city, there are numerous options for services and housing for homeless individuals, many of whom are believed to have a mental illness (Akins et al., n.d.).

From the perspective of Benton County law enforcement officials, contacts with PWSMI are time-intensive, unpredictable, and better suited to mental health professionals (also see Hoover, 2007). The law enforcement officials sought assistance from researchers in documenting the increase in mental health–related police contacts, identifying possible causes, and researching appropriate policy responses. The OSU researchers subsequently enlisted three Master of Public Policy students to conduct internships focusing on the mental health issue and to assist in collection and analysis of data.

The research team acquired two forms of data on local law enforcement interactions with PWSMI: official police data and semi-structured interviews with officials in the local criminal justice and mental health fields.[2] First, the Corvallis Police Department (CPD) made available official police contact and arrest data for the two largest agencies in the county (CPD and Benton County Sheriff's Office) from 2007 through 2012. The data allowed the researchers to identify all "Peace Officer Custody" (POC) arrests. As authorized by Oregon Revised Statute 426.228, an officer may enact a POC arrest when he or she believes that an individual poses a danger to himself or others due to mental illness or mental health crisis. The officer is then directed to take the detained individual to the nearest hospital or mental health facility for psychiatric evaluation. Short of a POC arrest, an officer may instead resolve an interaction informally, without detaining or arresting the person. Officers in CPD and the Benton County Sheriff's Office record all such informal resolutions, and these records allowed

researchers to identify informal interactions that had a basis in mental illness or mental health crisis.[3]

Using POC arrests as a measure of formal law enforcement contacts with PWSMI, researchers were able to describe changes in the frequency of police contacts with PWSMI and also the characteristics of justice-involved PWSMI. In brief, the data show a roughly 70% increase in mental health contacts in 2012 relative to previous years (245 POC arrests in 2012 vs. a maximum of 144 in the previous years). The increase was driven in large part by individuals who had multiple, high-frequency contacts with police: so-called "frequent fliers" (Akins, Burkhardt, & Lanfear, 2014). The increase in formal POC arrests was not due to an overall rise in criminal arrests in Benton County, as supplemental analysis shows POC arrests increasing faster than non-POC arrests. In addition, the increase in formal police contacts with PWSMI was not an artifact of these departments' increasing use of the formal POC arrest versus an informal resolution. Analysis of all informally resolved police–citizen encounters deemed to have a mental health component also increased. For example, informal resolutions of mental health–related interactions increased by roughly 50% from 2010 to 2011, going from fewer than 200 to more than 300 in one year. Thus, two different measures derived from official police data demonstrate a clear and dramatic increase in contacts between police and PWSMI (Akins et al., 2014).

For the second form of data, members of the research team conducted semi-structured interviews with 22 officials in local criminal justice agencies, mental health agencies, and community organizations. These interviews, conducted by student interns, were designed to gather information about existing institutions and services available to persons with mental illness and law enforcement officers who interact with them. These interviews supplemented a literature review of prior evaluations of criminal justice-based interventions for persons with mental illness to determine their potential utility in Benton County.

A final report includes recommendations for reform that are informed by prior research but tailored to the needs and resources of the local community. In brief, the report recommends a mental health court, improved health information sharing, an explicit framework for future collaboration among the relevant criminal justice and health agencies, and a specialized mental health response (preferably, Crisis Intervention Training). These recommendations represent just a first step in this collaboration. The research team intends to continue to track the prevalence of police contacts with persons with suspected mental illness and to evaluate future interventions.

Stakeholders and Benefits

This type of collaboration between law enforcement and researchers stands to benefit several groups of stakeholders. The first group is the university research team involved in the collaboration. Faculty researchers benefit from access to data that might advance their research agenda. Law enforcement agencies are rich sites for collecting various types of data, including official records, participant observations, ethnographies, and

surveys. These data can be used to further faculty members' scholarship, whether in the form of peer-reviewed journal articles, academic press books, or policy reports. By collaborating to address real-world problems, faculty may also expand the "broader impact" of their scholarship (Nilson, Jewell, Camman, Appell, & Wormith, 2014). This has three instrumental benefits for faculty. First, funding agencies (e.g., National Science Foundation) may make grants contingent on the project's potential to make a broader impact (National Science Foundation, n.d.). Working with police on a "problem-oriented" project may help in demonstrating this impact. Second, the real-world impact of one's work ("outcomes" vs. "output") may be considered in the promotion and tenure process, although this varies greatly (Beal & Kerlikowske, 2010; Buerger, 2010; Rojek et al., 2012). This component of one's work is likely to be valued in departments (or universities) with an applied orientation. Schools of public policy, for example, may be relatively amenable to such work and may view it as legitimate and important scholarship. Third, faculty may be responsible for placing undergraduate or graduate students in internships, and a working relationship between a faculty member and a criminal justice agency will likely facilitate such placements in the future.

Also in the university, students benefit from collaboration by becoming members of a research team. Many undergraduate or graduate programs offer academic credit for internships (Stichman & Farkas, 2005), and university–agency research collaborations can be a good opportunity for students to complete this curricular component (Bales, Scaggs, Clark, Ensley, & Coltharp, 2014; Buerger, 2010; Parilla & Hesser, 1998). Research experience in an applied setting may also prove beneficial to students when they seek future employment, either through the acquisition of general, transferable research skills or through preparation for a future career (Hiller, Salvatore, & Taniguchi, 2014; Stone & McLaren, 1999). Universities themselves may also benefit from collaboration. This is particularly true of land grant universities, which were historically charged with developing applied knowledge that can materially improve the lives of citizens.

In the Benton County context, the research project provided multiple graduate student internships, enabling the students to contribute to original research on an important community issue while satisfying educational requirements. The students spent significant time at multiple phases of the project including literature review, collecting interview data (mentioned above), contributing to quantitative analytical work, preparing a draft report, and assisting in the presentation of the results to local law enforcement, government, and public health stakeholders. The students gained extensive experience and are coauthors on multiple professional and academic outputs related to this work, which will serve them in their future career pursuits.

The second group that stands to gain from collaboration is the law enforcement agency involved in the collaboration. Policing is a relationship between the law enforcement agency and the community it serves. Law enforcement agencies operate in a more diverse, highly educated, and interactive world today and strive to establish and sustain trust within and among the communities they serve. Operational, philosophical, and policy transparency is critical in the modern age of policing (Engel & Whalen, 2010). In addition, law enforcement agencies may seek outside evaluation to

improve internal operations—what Engel and Whalen (2010) term "operational effectiveness and efficiency" (p. 106; also see Nilson et al., 2014). This has grown ever more important in an era of budget cuts and flagging economic health. Collaborative projects may or may not carry high monetary costs for the agency. (The Benton County collaboration described above carried almost no direct costs for the agencies.) In some cases, a collaborative intervention-based research project may require outlays from the agency (e.g., added costs for labor, data collection, information technology, and training). In such cases, the insights gained from the collaboration may eventually provide positive returns on the initial costs, with the long-term result being a more efficient operation. In addition, funding opportunities exist for collaborations, which can help offset some of the initial costs borne by the agency (or the university; Beal & Kerlikowske, 2010; Mock, 2010).

Collaboration with outside researchers may also help law enforcement heads to validate decisions and protocols (Engel & Whalen, 2010). When controversy erupts (or litigation ensues), it can be helpful for a chief to point to externally validated "best practices" or "evidence-based practices" that were being followed (Lum, Koper, & Telep, 2011). In an age of data transparency and sophisticated analytics, agency chiefs no longer have unfettered discretion in guiding police practices, and rigorous empirical research provides justification for decisions made. In addition, the transparency and openness that comes from police sharing decision-making details with the public is likely to increase the legitimacy of the police (Engel & Whalen, 2010), which may ultimately lead to increased compliance (Tyler, 2006).

Other stakeholders not directly involved in the research collaboration also stand to benefit. Two groups in Benton County may reap some benefit from the university–law enforcement collaboration. The first group is justice-involved PWSMI. The recommendations provided in the report aim to divert PWSMI out of the criminal justice system and into better mental health treatment processes. Implementation of any recommended diversion programs is subject to political and economic vagaries, but at the very least, the research serves to document a problem and propose some positive alternatives. Second, the collaborative research may foster closer relationships between law enforcement and local mental health agencies and service providers. Interviews with local law enforcement and mental health agents revealed a desire for more robust communications between these organizations. Although the research on its own may be insufficient to generate such communications, it serves as an initial bridge that may help disparate agencies identify common goals and work toward achieving them.

Challenges and Recommendations

Although a collaborative research relationship stands to yield benefits for researchers and practitioners, it also presents a number of challenges. This section highlights several challenges that were encountered in the Benton County collaboration (and in other contexts), along with suggestions for confronting them. These challenges fall into four roughly chronological categories—relationship definition, data collection and

analysis, outputs, and relationship maintenance—although in practice these are not so neatly delineated.

Defining the Relationship

The first challenge in collaboration is to define the nature of the relationship (Rudes, Viglione, Lerch, Porter, & Taxman, 2014). This means, at least, defining the tasks to be accomplished and defining time lines for completing them. The challenge of *defining the tasks* at hand comes from the fact that police and researchers often have different priorities, and these may not generally be known to the other party. Whereas university researchers place a premium on valid and reliable data collection and analysis, police place a premium on operational efficiency and demonstrable public safety outcomes (Braga & Hinkle, 2010; Lane, Turner, & Flores, 2004). In the Benton County case, the police came to the researchers with a general concern about law enforcement contacts with suspects displaying symptoms of mental illness. Presented with a broad problem like this, the initial task for researchers was to organize the input from the police chiefs and refine it into a tractable research project, while also ensuring that the resulting analyses would be of use to law enforcement. As a general rule, police do not speak in terms of research questions and hypotheses (Braga & Hinkle, 2010), and researchers do not bring with them an intricate knowledge of the internal operational challenges faced by the police. Thus, defining the tasks to be accomplished can be difficult, but it is a critical milepost in a successful collaboration.

Police and university researchers also operate on different time horizons, and therefore, another challenge is to *define the time lines* for completing the specified tasks. Academic researchers have long time horizons. It may take years to navigate the process of data collection, analysis, writing, peer-review, and publication. Police operate in a more immediate context, where the priority is on taking action (Foster & Bailey, 2010; Lane et al., 2004; Nilson et al., 2014; Skogan, 2010; Worden, McLean, & Bonner, 2014). It is, therefore, advisable to have open, upfront conversations about deadlines and time horizons during initial meetings between the two parties. Once the research tasks and time lines have been set, they are not immutable. It is important to keep lines of communication open throughout the process (Fleming, 2010). Unanticipated events may force changes in the research: Data may be more (or less) available than anticipated, a university's Institutional Review Board may pose issues, personnel may turn over, or funding may run out. Any such changes should be communicated to all parties in the collaboration so as to maintain a positive working relationship.

Data Collection and Analysis

Research collaborations will typically involve *collection and analysis of primary data* involving police practices. Information technology has revolutionized law enforcement (Pattavina, 2005; Silverman, 2006), and police agencies are often awash with detailed data on all manner of events (Engel & Whalen, 2010). The

agencies themselves use these data for internal purposes: ensuring proper procedures are followed, documenting incidents in the event of litigation, and managing officers' time. These official police data may prove valuable for academic research. However, because their collection was designed for purposes of internal accounting, rather than external analysis, researchers need to understand how the data were derived and from what context they come (Greene, 2010; Tillyer et al., 2013). Researchers may also need to familiarize themselves with local terminology, whose meaning is often taken for granted by police practitioners (Nilson et al., 2014). For example, in an early meeting to discuss data to be used in Benton County collaboration, researchers and police chiefs spent more than an hour talking past each regarding the nature of a "Peace Officer Custody," which turned out to be a central measure of police contact with persons with suspected mental illness. Subsequent meetings between law enforcement data entry personnel and the researchers took place in the police department to enable direct computer access to the relevant data files. These meetings proved invaluable at identifying relevant data, while efficiently alleviating concerns about data interpretation and validity.[4] Future collaborations should prioritize such meetings early in the process to assist in the process of settling on research questions that are satisfying to law enforcement stakeholders and answerable with the available data.

Outputs

It is important to determine the *output* of the work. A collaborative research project will have many possible audiences, and each one will prefer a particular type of product. For an academic audience, the proper output is a peer-reviewed journal article or book. For a police practitioner audience, the proper output is a straightforward report with an eye toward application and practice (Braga & Hinkle, 2010; Lum, Telep, Koper, & Grieco, 2012; Skogan, 2010). Similarly, if the audience includes policymakers, the output should come in the form of concise, easily digestible briefs that can be incorporated into a policy position. Although academics are good at producing basic science for their peers, they often fail in translating their research for a practitioner or policymaker audience. This point was made more salient by former National Institute of Justice Director John Laub in his call for "translational criminology" (Laub, 2011). For a collaborative research program to benefit the practitioner partners, it must yield straightforward, accessible, and actionable products (perhaps in addition to technical, peer-reviewed manuscripts). It is advisable to communicate about the specific deliverables early to avoid disappointment or resentment in any of the collaborators (Fleming, 2010; Skogan, 2010).

In the case of the Benton County project, multiple outputs were generated and tailored for different audiences. These outputs included a non-technical policy report and presentation to an organization of community stakeholders that included elected officials, attorneys, judges, business leaders, and community members. More technical outputs included presentations at academic conferences and articles in academic journals. Finally, a press release was issued by the university, which was picked up by a number of reporters for print and broadcast news outlets. With each form of public

communication, the research personnel kept law enforcement partners aware of these communications and ensured that content conveyed to the media remained tied to the empirical findings and did not venture into speculation unwarranted by the research.

The latter point exposes a challenge that arises in collaborations involving elected officials (or those embedded in a political environment): how to present valid and complete findings while not *needlessly* exposing collaborators to political turmoil. Although concise, accessible research products are beneficial to practitioner and policymaking audiences, they also may become fodder for political or media attacks. Criminal justice managers expose themselves and their agencies when they agree to collaborate with researchers (Fleming, 2010; Stephens, 2010). Although it is clearly inappropriate to censor relevant results, researchers should write for public audiences in such a way that minimizes potential misunderstandings that could lead to political or public blowback for the collaborating agencies. With open communication channels, the practitioners should be able to alert researchers to potentially misleading statements, and the two parties can then negotiate an appropriate presentation of the findings.

Maintaining the Relationship

Collaborators must actively work to maintain a long-term relationship (Rudes et al., 2014). Several issues are relevant here: *turnover, trust*, and *scale*. Turnover is a serious threat to long-term collaboration. Previous writing has stressed that the best collaborations are between institutions rather than individuals (Boba, 2010; Engel & Whalen, 2010). On the law enforcement side, agency heads are subject to the vagaries of political appointment or elections, and may not remain in the agency for long (Engel & Whalen, 2010; Fleming, 2010). For example, in the Benton County case, former Sheriff Diana Simpson, a driving force behind this project in the initial stages, retired in 2013. Fortunately, the transition to the new Sheriff (Scott Jackson) caused no disruption in the collaborative research project. On the researcher side, faculty members may depart due to a voluntary career move or perhaps denial of tenure. A collaboration is likely to wither if it is dependent on personal ties between transient individuals. There are several ways to institutionalize a long-term collaboration: for example, signing a formal memorandum of understanding (MOU) between organizations, which specifies long-term goals of collaboration; seeking and receiving grants for research or collaboration; inviting police to serve as speakers in classes or seminars; or sending university students to intern with law enforcement (cf. Rudes et al., 2014). The Benton County collaboration engaged in two of these practices: seeking grants for collaboration and engaging student interns. In this case, the parties did not enter into a formal MOU because the collaboration focused on a single phenomenon: police interactions with PWSMI. An MOU that designates ongoing roles and responsibilities of all parties and identifies future research programs may be more appropriate in collaborations that are broader in scope and span multiple research projects (McEwen, 2003).

Trust is also important in collaboration. As described above, the police (and other practitioners) expose themselves to the possibility of criticism and embarrassment

when they share their data with researchers. Practitioners may be leery of collaboration with university researchers. In part, this is a by-product of many years of critical "hit-and-run" research (Rosenbaum, 2010, p. 144), in which academic research critiques police operations but offer no positive recommendations for reform (Bradley & Nixon, 2009). A robust relationship requires researchers to gain the trust of police (Braga & Hinkle, 2010) and to respect the position that these officials occupy. This involves, at least, open and regular communication between the parties, in which researchers seek feedback on data collection, analysis, and interpretation from their practitioner partners (Rudes et al., 2014). Also important is for researchers to acknowledge their collaborators in official documents produced from the collaboration. Although not always appropriate, this may entail coauthorship (as in the present article).[5]

The difficulty of collaboration is likely to grow with the *scale* of the collaboration. Collaboration may be easier in smaller jurisdictions, like Benton County, for at least two reasons. First, researchers will likely find it easier to "penetrate" a small agency with fewer layers of bureaucracy. It may be easier to establish rapport between the principals, who may work together rather closely. Second, the logistics of collaboration are simpler in a smaller jurisdiction. Proximity between the university and the police headquarters is a mundane matter, but one that can make impromptu meetings easier to facilitate (Boba, 2010; Worden et al., 2014). In the Benton County case, OSU and the headquarters for the CPD and Benton County Sheriff are only one mile apart. In much larger jurisdictions, the burden of arranging meetings between researchers and police agency officials may inhibit close working relationships. Finally, the challenges described above can be expected to grow substantially as additional partners are brought on as collaborators. The Benton County collaboration formally involved two sets of parties: law enforcement and university researchers. Similar projects could incorporate additional partners: mental health agencies, hospital emergency departments, community-based organizations, and more. Although these additional parties may prove fruitful in offering data and insights, principal investigators should be cognizant of the increasing complexity they will introduce.

Conclusion

Collaborative work between university researchers and law enforcement agencies is on the rise (Guillaume et al., 2012), despite the very real challenges that both parties face. These challenges—in defining the relationship, collecting and analyzing data, generating appropriate outputs, and maintaining the relationship—should not blind potential collaborators to the benefits of collaboration. Academic researchers may benefit from access to unique data, a research program with a "broader impact," and opportunities for student involvement. Law enforcement agencies stand to gain improved knowledge about a public safety problem, which may lead to improvements in public safety, gains in operational efficiency, and external validation for operational decisions. In the Benton County case, benefits for the researchers have included access to a wealth of official data on formal and informal police interactions with PWSMI,

academic presentations and publications, and educational opportunities for student interns. Benefits for Benton County law enforcement officials include increased knowledge about the extent of contacts with PWSMI, policy recommendations informed by empirical research and tailored to local conditions, and a public document that can serve to foster collaboration with organizations in the mental health field. Substantively, the collaboration has encouraged local agencies to explore the feasibility of a mental health court.

We conclude by posing a number of questions that researchers and practitioners should ask themselves when contemplating a future collaborative research relationship. For academic researchers: (a) *Does your institution value applied, policy-related work?* This is perhaps the primary question for university faculty seeking promotion and tenure. Some universities have adopted tenure and promotion guidelines that accommodate, and even encourage, community-engaged scholarship: "teaching, discovery, integration, application and engagement that involves the faculty member in a mutually beneficial partnership with the community" (Center for Service and Community Engagement, n.d., para. 2; also see Community-Campus Partnerships for Health, n.d.; Rewarding Community-Engaged Scholarship, 2015). Yet many departments will devalue such work, deeming it "too applied" (Skogan, 2010, p. 130). If the researcher is in such a department, it will be essential to frame the task (and conduct the data collection and analysis) in such a way that will allow for theoretically informed, "basic science" research while also contributing some useable knowledge for practitioners. (b) *Are there opportunities for student involvement?* Most researchers are also teachers, and they may be responsible for providing students with research experience (e.g., as an intern or research assistant). A robust collaborative relationship may be valuable for providing student entry into the world of research.

Police practitioners should consider the following issues: (c) *Is your agency willing to share data?* Agencies may be reluctant to share data, for fear of embarrassment, privacy violations, or political scandal. It is unreasonable to give unfettered access to every corner of a police department's vast store of data, but police should be willing to grant university researchers reasonably free access to data, whether it be archived records (e.g., arrest files) or individuals (e.g., interviews with officers). (d) Relatedly, *will officers and staff cooperate with researchers?* Although upper level consent to collaborate with external researchers is necessary for a productive relationship, it is not sufficient. It is also important for officers and department staff to cooperate with researchers. This is relevant to data collection, but it becomes even more critical when the collaboration involves an intervention implemented by frontline officers and department staff.

Finally, both researchers and law enforcement practitioners ask, (e) *does your time horizon match that of your partner?* Law enforcement agencies may be surprised at the amount of time researchers take to gather and analyze data. Researchers may feel pressure to produce immediate results. To avoid misunderstanding and disappointment, both groups should talk openly and early about time tables.

With the issue of mental health occupying a central place in modern U.S. criminal justice, locally based, problem-oriented collaborations may yield improvements in law

enforcement relations with PWSMI as well as scientific advancements in the academy (Lurigio, 2012). If the involved parties can answer the above questions affirmatively, collaboration may open exciting new opportunities for researchers and police.

Acknowledgments

We are grateful for assistance from Diana Simpson, former sheriff of Benton County; Jennifer Hendricks, Corvallis Police Department; and Sally Duncan, director of the Oregon State University Policy Analysis Laboratory.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Notes

1. We adopt the phrase "person with *suspected* mental illness" (and the acronym PWSMI) to indicate individuals who are *perceived* by law enforcement officers to have a possible mental illness. The phrase does not imply the existence of a formal, clinical diagnosis.
2. A complete description of data, methods, findings, and recommendations is provided in a publicly available report presented to the Willamette Criminal Justice Council (http://www.co.benton.or.us/da/wcjc/index.php). Further information about the data and analysis of the police data is published in Akins, Burkhardt, and Lanfear (2014) and Akins, Burkhardt, Lanfear, Stevens, and Amorim (n.d.).
3. Informal resolutions were regarded as having a mental health component if responding officers used the word *mental* or the related code number in an incident report, or if a 911 dispatcher coded a call for service as "mental" based on information from the caller. For more details on how these data were coded and analyzed, see Akins et al. (2014).
4. The law enforcement agencies were especially willing to grant access to relevant data in this case because the research was prompted by their own concerns about contacts with persons suspected to have a mental illness. Law enforcement agencies in other jurisdictions may not be as forthcoming with relevant data, particularly when the research does not aim to address a local problem or provide any practical outputs.
5. Formal coauthorship is not possible in many cases. For example, practitioners may want to keep their distance from a report for political reasons discussed above. From the other side, researchers may desire to retain the appearance of full impartiality by authoring peer-reviewed manuscripts without practitioners.

References

Abramson, M. F. (1972). The criminalization of mentally disordered behavior: Possible side-effect of a new mental health law. *Psychiatric Services*, *23*, 101-105.

Akins, S., Burkhardt, B. C., & Lanfear, C. (2014). Law enforcement response to "frequent fliers": An examination of high-frequency contacts between police and justice-involved

persons with mental illness. *Criminal Justice Policy Review*. Advance online publication. doi:10.1177/0887403414559268

Akins, S., Burkhardt, B. C., Lanfear, C., Stevens, K., & Amorim, M. (n.d.). *Law enforcement response to people with mental illnesses in Benton County: Executive summary*. Retrieved from http://www.co.benton.or.us/da/wcjc/documents/OSUFinalExecSummaryReport.pdf

Bales, W. D., Scaggs, S. J. A., Clark, C. L., Ensley, D., & Coltharp, P. (2014). Researcher–practitioner partnerships: A case of the development of a long-term collaborative project between a university and a criminal justice agency. *Criminal Justice Studies*, *27*, 294-307.

Beal, P., & Kerlikowske, R. G. (2010). Action research in Buffalo and Seattle. *Police Practice & Research*, *11*, 117-121. doi:10.1080/15614261003590852

Bittner, E. (1967). Police discretion in emergency apprehension of mentally ill persons. *Social Problems*, *14*, 278-292.

Boba, R. (2010). A practice-based evidence approach in Florida. *Police Practice & Research*, *11*, 122-128. doi:10.1080/15614261003593021

Bradley, D., & Nixon, C. (2009). Ending the "dialogue of the deaf": Evidence and policing policies and practices. An Australian case study. *Police Practice & Research*, *10*, 423-435. doi:10.1080/15614260903378384

Braga, A. A., & Hinkle, M. (2010). The participation of academics in the criminal justice working group process. In J. Klofas, N. K. Hipple, & E. McGarrell (Eds.), *The new criminal justice: American communities and the changing world of crime control* (pp. 114-120). New York, NY: Routledge.

Brydon-Miller, M., Greenwood, D., & Maguire, P. (2003). Why action research? *Action Research*, *1*, 9-28. doi:10.1177/14767503030011002

Buerger, M. E. (2010). Policing and research: Two cultures separated by an almost-common language. *Police Practice & Research*, *11*, 135-143. doi:10.1080/15614261003593187

Center for Problem-Oriented Policing. (2013). *The SARA Model*. Author. Retrieved from http://www.popcenter.org/about/?p=sara

Center for Service and Community Engagement. (n.d.). *Community-engaged scholarship.* Retrieved from http://www.seattleu.edu/CCE/teaching/scholarship/

Charette, Y., Crocker, A. G., & Billette, I. (2014). Police encounters involving citizens with mental illness: Use of resources and outcomes. *Psychiatric Services*, *65*, 511-516. doi:10.1176/appi.ps.201300053

Childs, K. K., & Potter, R. H. (2014). Developing and sustaining collaborative research partnerships with universities and criminal justice agencies. *Criminal Justice Studies*, *27*, 245-248. doi:10.1080/1478601X.2014.947810

Community-Campus Partnerships for Health. (n.d.). *Community-Engaged Scholarship*. Retrieved from https://ccph.memberclicks.net/community-engaged-scholarship

Cordner, G., & White, S. (2010). The evolving relationship between police research and police practice. *Police Practice & Research*, *11*, 90-94. doi:10.1080/15614261003590753

Deane, M. W., Steadman, H. J., Borum, R., Veysey, B. M., & Morrissey, J. P. (1999). Emerging partnerships between mental health and law enforcement. *Psychiatric Services*, *50*, 99-101.

Engel, R. S., & Silver, E. (2001). Policing mentally disordered suspects: A reexamination of the criminalization hypothesis. *Criminology*, *39*, 225-252. doi:10.1111/j.1745-9125.2001.tb00922.x

Engel, R. S., & Whalen, J. L. (2010). Police–academic partnerships: Ending the dialogue of the deaf, the Cincinnati experience. *Police Practice & Research*, *11*, 105-116. doi:10.1080/15614261003590803

Fleming, J. (2010). Learning to work together: Police and academics. *Policing*, *4*, 139-145. doi:10.1093/police/paq002

Foster, J., & Bailey, S. (2010). Joining forces: Maximizing ways of making a difference in policing. *Policing*, *4*, 95-103. doi:10.1093/police/paq007

Fyfe, N. R., & Wilson, P. (2012). Knowledge exchange and police practice: Broadening and deepening the debate around researcher–practitioner collaborations. *Police Practice & Research*, *13*, 306-314. doi:10.1080/15614263.2012.671596

Goldstein, H. (1979). Improving policing: A problem-oriented approach. *Crime & Delinquency*, *25*, 236-258. doi:10.1177/001112877902500207

Greene, J. R. (2010). Collaborations between police and research/academic organizations: Some prescriptions from the field. In J. Klofas, N. K. Hipple, & E. McGarrell (Eds.), *The new criminal justice: American communities and the changing world of crime control* (pp. 121-127). New York, NY: Routledge.

Guillaume, P., Sidebottom, A., & Tilley, N. (2012). On police and university collaborations: A problem-oriented policing case study. *Police Practice & Research*, *13*, 389-401. doi:10.1080/15614263.2012.671621

Hiller, M. L., Salvatore, C., & Taniguchi, T. (2014). Evaluation of a criminal justice internship program: Why do students take it and does it improve career preparedness? *Journal of Criminal Justice Education*, *25*, 1-15.

Hoover, L. T. (2007). Atypical situations—atypical responses. In T. J. Jurkanin, L. T. Hoover, & V. A. Sergevnin (Eds.), *Improving police response to persons with mental illness: A progressive approach* (pp. 5-23). Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas.

James, D. J., & Glaze, L. E. (2006). *Mental health problems of prison and jail inmates*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics.

Johnson, R. R. (2011). Suspect mental disorder and police use of force. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, *38*, 127-145. doi:10.1177/0093854810388160

Lamb, H. R., Weinberger, L. E., & DeCuir, W. J. (2002). The police and mental health. *Psychiatric Services*, *53*, 1266-1271. doi:10.1176/appi.ps.53.10.1266

Lane, J., Turner, S., & Flores, C. (2004). Researcher-practitioner collaboration in community corrections: Overcoming hurdles for successful partnerships. *Criminal Justice Review*, *29*, 97-114. doi:10.1177/073401680402900107

Laub, J. H. (2011). *What is translational criminology?* Retrieved from http://www.nij.gov/journals/268/Pages/criminology.aspx

Lum, C., Koper, C. S., & Telep, C. W. (2011). The evidence-based policing matrix. *Journal of Experimental Criminology*, *7*(1), 3-26. doi:10.1007/s11292-010-9108-2

Lum, C., Telep, C. W., Koper, C. S., & Grieco, J. (2012). Receptivity to research in policing. *Justice Research and Policy*, *14*(1), 61-96.

Lurigio, A. J. (2012). Responding to the needs of people with mental illness in the criminal justice system: An area ripe for research and community partnerships. *Journal of Crime & Justice*, *35*, 1-12. doi:10.1080/0735648X.2011.637402

McEwen, T. (2003). *Evaluation of the locally initiated research partnership program*. Alexandria, VA: Institute for Law and Justice.

Mock, L. F. (2010). Action research for crime control and prevention. In J. Klofas, N. K. Hipple, & E. McGarrell (Eds.), *The new criminal justice: American communities and the changing world of crime control* (pp. 97-102). New York, NY: Routledge.

Mulvey, P., & White, M. (2014). The potential for violence in arrests of persons with mental illness. *Policing: An International Journal of Police Strategies & Management*, *37*, 404-419. doi:10.1108/PIJPSM-07-2013-0076

National Science Foundation. (n.d.). *Broader impacts review criterion*. Retrieved from http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/2007/nsf07046/nsf07046.jsp

Nilson, C., Jewell, L. M., Camman, C., Appell, R., & Wormith, J. S. (2014). Community-engaged scholarship: The experience of ongoing collaboration between criminal justice professionals and scholars at the University of Saskatchewan. *Criminal Justice Studies*, *27*, 264-277.

Novak, K. J., & Engel, R. S. (2005). Disentangling the influence of suspects' demeanor and mental disorder on arrest. *Policing: An International Journal of Police Strategies & Management*, *28*, 493-512. doi:10.1108/13639510510614573

Parilla, P. F., & Hesser, G. W. (1998). Internships and the sociological perspective: Applying principles of experiential learning. *Teaching Sociology*, *26*, 310-329.

Pattavina, A. (Ed.). (2005). *Information technology and the criminal justice system*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Prins, S. J., & Draper, L. (2009). Improving outcomes for people with mental illnesses under community corrections supervision: A guide to research-informed policy and practice. New York, NY: Council of State Governments Justice Center.

Raphael, S., & Stoll, M. A. (2013). Assessing the contribution of the deinstitutionalization of the mentally ill to growth in the U.S. incarceration rate. *Journal of Legal Studies*, *42*, 187-222.

Reisig, M. D. (2011). Community and problem-oriented policing. In M. Tonry (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of crime and criminal justice* (pp. 538-576). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Reuland, M., Draper, L., & Norton, B. (2010). *Improving responses to people with mental illnesses: Tailoring law enforcement initiatives to individual jurisdictions*. New York, NY: Council of State Governments Justice Center. doi:10.1037/e528332010–001

Rewarding Community-Engaged Scholarship. (2015). *Resources*. Retrieved from http://engagedscholarship.ca/resources/

Rojek, J., Alpert, G., & Smith, H. (2012). The utilization of research by the police. *Police Practice & Research*, *13*, 329-341. doi:10.1080/15614263.2012.671599

Rosenbaum, D. P. (2010). Police research: Merging the policy and action research traditions. *Police Practice & Research*, *11*, 144-149. doi:10.1080/15614261003593203

Rudes, D. S., Viglione, J., Lerch, J., Porter, C., & Taxman, F. S. (2014). Build to sustain: Collaborative partnerships between university researchers and criminal justice practitioners. *Criminal Justice Studies*, *27*, 249-263. doi:10.1080/1478601X.2014.947808

Ruiz, J. (2004). An exploratory study of Pennsylvania police officers' perceptions of dangerousness and their ability to manage persons with mental illness. *Police Quarterly*, *7*, 359-371. doi:10.1177/1098611103258957

Silverman, E. B. (2006). Compstat's innovation. In D. Weisburd & A. A. Braga (Eds.), *Police innovation: Contrasting perspectives* (pp. 267-283). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Skogan, W. G. (2010). The challenge of timeliness and utility in research and evaluation. In J. M. Klofas & N. K. Hipple (Eds.), *The new criminal justice: American communities and the changing world of crime control* (pp. 128-131). New York, NY: Edmund F. McGarrell.

Stephens, D. W. (2010). Enhancing the impact of research on police practice. *Police Practice & Research*, *11*, 150-154. doi:10.1080/15614261003593278

Stichman, A. J., & Farkas, M. A. (2005). The pedagogical use of internships in criminal justice programs: A nationwide study. *Journal of Criminal Justice Education*, *16*, 145-165.

Stone, W. E., & McLaren, J. (1999). Assessing the undergraduate intern experience. *Journal of Criminal Justice Education*, *10*, 171-183.

Teplin, L. A. (1984). Criminalizing mental disorder: The comparative arrest rate of the mentally ill. *American Psychologist*, *39*, 794-803.

Tillyer, R., Tillyer, M. S., McCluskey, J., Cancino, J., Todaro, J., & McKinnon, L. (2013). Researcher–practitioner partnerships and crime analysis: A case study in action research. *Police Practice & Research*, *15*, 404-418. doi:10.1080/15614263.2013.829321

Tyler, T. R. (2006). *Why people obey the law*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Weisburd, D., Telep, C. W., Hinkle, J. C., & Eck, J. E. (2010). Is problem-oriented policing effective in reducing crime and disorder? *Criminology & Public Policy*, *9*, 139-172. doi:10.1111/j.1745-9133.2010.00617.x

White, M. D., Goldkamp, J. S., & Campbell, S. P. (2006). Co-occurring mental illness and substance abuse in the criminal justice system: Some implications for local jurisdictions. *The Prison Journal*, *86*, 301-326. doi:10.1177/0032885506290852

Worden, R. E., McLean, S. J., & Bonner, H. S. (2014). Research partners in criminal justice: Notes from Syracuse. *Criminal Justice Studies*, *27*, 278-293.

Wuestewald, T., & Steinheider, B. (2009). Practitioner-researcher collaboration in policing: A case of close encounters? *Policing*, *4*, 104-111. doi:10.1093/police/pap035