

Tipping Point: CACP Research Foundation Conference Round-up

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The first-ever Canadian conference focusing on policing research was hosted by the CACP Research Foundation in Montreal, QC in early March. The event brought together 160 police executives, academics, police researchers and expert speakers from across Canada to focus on the need for, and ways to incorporate, evidence-based policing throughout the policing system across the country. More than one delegate commented that the event represented a “tipping point” in policing research in Canada.

Keynote speaker Chief Constable Sara Thornton from the UK’s National Police Chief’s Council kicked off the agenda offering insights from “across the pond”, noting that financial austerity measures there have underscored the necessity to reduce costs by avoiding duplication of resources and activities, and ensuring that policing strategies are effective and evidence-based. It is also important for the police to maintain legitimacy by cultivating the ethics and values of policing as a profession.

From the start to finish of the conference, it was noted that the policing system in Canada, as elsewhere, continues to face a need for a “whole system” transformation on multiple fronts rather than mere incremental improvements or adjustments. There was general appreciation that research and evidence-based practice play key roles in sustaining legitimacy and public confidence in policing.

During the closing town hall session moderated by Norman Taylor, Editor-in-Chief of the Community Safety Knowledge Alliance’s soon-to-be published Journal of Community Safety and Well-being, there was general acknowledgement for the growing need to condition police leaders and staff, from recruitment through early training and throughout their continuing professional development, police governance officials, and other policy makers to:

- regard policing as a social science,
- respect the vital role of evidence-based knowledge,
- cultivate and nurture strong and effective partnerships with the academic community and with all potential contributors to research funding, and to
- engage actively as both generators and consumers of research to inform policy and practice at all levels of the system

New Initiatives – New Collaborations

The conference showcased several organizations and new knowledge exchange initiatives across Canada, indicating a strong appetite for made-in-Canada, published-in-Canada evidence to support police transformation and related social innovation in this country. For all, emphasis is on applying research in practice, and on collaboration between practitioners, researchers and other disciplines like medicine, business and other social sciences.

The **Canadian Society of Evidence-based Policing (CAN-SEBP)**, a voluntary network of police researchers, educators and public safety groups, is dedicated to creating actionable policing research. CAN-SEBP promotes the fundamental principles of evidence-based policing including the role of scientific research in developing effective and efficient policing programs, policing research that is useful and methodologically rigorous, results that are translatable into police policy and practice, and research that is a blend of police practice and academic skill.

The **Community Safety Knowledge Alliance (CSKA)** was launched in the past year to foster multi-disciplinary research and knowledge development aimed at improving safety and well-being in communities across Canada. The organization stemmed from Saskatchewan's Building Partnerships to Reduce Crime initiative, a multi-agency, cross-disciplinary approach to reducing crime and building safer communities. CSKA works to identify gaps in knowledge and understanding related to community safety and well-being, and bringing together key partners that can collaborate and problem solve to address them. Key initiatives include the Journal for Community Safety and Well-being that will launch in August 2016.

In a session entitled, *"Building Better Links between Researchers, Police Forces and the Private Sector to Improve Online Privacy and Security for Canadians"*, Dr. Benoit Dupont of the **Smart Cybersecurity Network (SERENE-RISC)** highlighted the growing problem of cybercrime and the measures his organization is taking to counter it. SERENE-RISC is a knowledge mobilization network created to raise awareness among the public about cybercrimes, and to reduce the risk through knowledge. The organization moves information from producers to end users thereby strengthening connections between researchers, practitioners and policy makers. With members from 20 universities, 10 private sector companies, eight government agencies and four non-governmental organizations, SERENE-RISC aims to fuse dispersed knowledge to help critical infrastructure operators, online service providers and public and private security organizations to analyse risks, and design and implement effective solutions.

The Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police Research Foundation (CACP RF) unveiled the next steps in its renewal, presenting its new mission, vision and strategic plan to conference delegates. The Foundation's mission is "to promote the creation, use and sharing of collaborative research in Canadian policing". Speakers and delegates expressed strong appreciation for the re-imagined organization and its mandate, including:

- support for continuing with national exchanges and networking opportunities such as an annual conference,
- broad support for, and commitment to advocate, for various forms of deeper engagement among localized practitioners, policy makers, and academics,
- eagerness to engage with proposed new web and social media tools, and
- a shared desire to continue expanding the community of practice in policing research in Canada

Research Tips

Canadian pollster Nik Nanos, Chairman of NANOS RESEARCH, cautioned delegates to critically examine the evidence-base used to inform their decision making. He argued that in order to make well-informed

decisions, the evidence at hand must be sound. “It’s not any evidence, but the right evidence” that must be applied.

To illustrate, Mr. Nanos pointed to examples where samples may not be representative of the true population under study, findings may be over (or under) interpreted, or findings that fail to take margin of error into consideration in their analysis. Furthermore, design of the question(s) can impact the outcome of the study. The ordering and wording of the questions may bias participants towards answering in a certain way, assume the participant possess knowledge that they do not, or might employ jargon that is difficult to understand. His recommendations for approaching research to get the best results include:

- tight method design and analysis,
- utilization of random sampling to ensure appropriate population coverage,
- proper interpretation of data,
- alignment of the research question and the data to ensure that the data truly measures what to the researchers want it to measure,
- acknowledgement of the study’s limitations, and
- use of unbiased and specific questions and/or measures that do not lead outcomes

SNAPSHOT!

Ten brave attendees took to the stage and challenged the three-minute timer during SNAPSHOT, one of the most popular sessions at the conference. The audience gave their undivided attention and support as each presenter summarized a research project, looked for partners or put forward ideas. Lots of information and lots of fun! Watch for these topics on upcoming CATA Alliance video podcasts.

Police and Academics: Partnering in Research

There is a history of successful working relationships between police and academic researchers in Canada. With initiatives like Public Safety Canada’s *Economics of Policing*, the emergence of new organizations, and the degree of participation at the first Canadian conference on policing research will support police leaders who seek more effective and efficient ways of solving problems and achieving goals.

Using the example of the successful Winnipeg Auto Theft Suppression Strategy, Professor Rick Linden of the University of Manitoba highlighted some of the benefits to researchers, practitioners and the public from partnership in evidence-based research projects. Academics can assist in translating empirical research findings into policy to improve outcomes by being involved in project development. Police practitioners can provide access to data and research subjects.

Trust, mutual respect and goodwill are the foundations to any successful working relationship. Brian Roberts, Executive Director, Office of Strategy Management of the Edmonton Police Services, discussed ways in which evidence-based information can improve the delivery of police services and how to

overcome potential pitfalls within the practitioner-researcher relationship. He shared that collaboration can be difficult at times.

Academics may use jargon or frame recommendations inappropriately for the police audience, they may be interested in publishing work externally that has been conducted within a police organization, and they may discount the importance of producing practical results that can be applied (affordably). Police practitioners, on the other hand, have been criticized for being slow to innovate, for lacking the right level of research, evaluation competencies and abilities to successfully implement results, and for discounting long-term, complex solutions that may address the core reasons for crime in favour of the immediate “quick fix”.

Developing research projects that have clear value to the policing community and the citizens they serve, open and honest communications of needs and mutual respect were key recommendations for creating a level playing field. Guidelines for effective police-researcher partnerships are provided in ***Guidelines for Police Academic Partnerships*** from the CACP Research Foundation available [here](#).

Wrap up

This was the first conference of its kind...an experiment. Delegates provided feedback that this should be an annual event, giving the entire evidence-based community a chance to connect. Innovative activities were suggested for future conferences that will add to participants’ networking experience. We look forward to bringing some of these to the community in 2017.