Being Everywhere: Using Embedded Research Practice to facilitate multi-site observations of police missing persons work

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Policing responses to missing persons are enacted by a geographically and temporally disparate network of intra-organisational actors. Being 'there' and 'then' to observe these actions necessitates more researcher-directed onsite data collection, which in turn requires mobility and authority not normally accorded to those outside of the Police Service. One method for facilitating this is Embedded Research Practice (Petersillia, 2008; Braga & Davis, 2014, Humphrey, 2017).

Embedded research practice allows the researcher to become an on-site trusted partner in knowledge and impact co-production. It places the researcher as an organisationally authorised ‘Outsider, Within’ in the organisational network. Clearance and site access can match that of a temporary staff member, yet critical independence and data ownership is maintained. Given the sensitivity of the data and the legislative framework of policing contexts, such practice demands a high level of integrity and professionalism from the researcher.

To expand on previous iterations of the concept, this presentation will draw on experiences of embedded practice used to support an in-depth thematic case study of police missing persons work in two UK police forces. Despite some practical implications, embeddedness provided critical researcher flexibility in conducting multi-site observations. Professional and ethical considerations arising from the complex nature of conducting research in this way will be addressed.

It is concluded that researcher embeddedness creates long term trusted partnerships which increase evidenced based practices, strengthen knowledge exchange and optimise future research potential.