



# A decade of collaboration, and why community safety must be co-produced

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## INTRODUCTION: WHAT THIS JOURNAL HAS MADE POSSIBLE

When the *Journal of Community Safety and Well-Being* (JCSWB) launched, it did more than fill a gap. I vividly remember discovering the journal as I was looking after my newborn son. The words “community safety and well-being” side by side stood out as a bold step in a field largely dominated by policing and law enforcement and criminology narratives occasionally associated with clinical terms (mental health, addiction, etc.). My squeal of delight actually woke up the baby.

In that moment, it dawned on me that this new journal finally offered a home for the growing realization, documentation, and analysis that “community safety” and “well-being” cannot be siloed, and that policing and public health often (albeit not always) operate together. Anyone who has read my work knows of my strong opinions around operational silos. And you will have a hard time changing my mind: policing, public health, human services, education, and community expertise meet one another in the lives of people who are often vulnerable, unheard, and crossing institutional thresholds. They therefore should be studied together, when needed.

Over 10 years, the JCSWB has modelled a vanguard scholarly posture: that of an open-access, cross-sector, practice-enabling, and dialogic rather than doctrinaire publication. My own journey with the journal, from early contributions on justice–health intersections to a contributing editor role later, further cemented a holistic, systems-informed approach to complex social problem-solving, informed by collective impact initiatives and the integration of services.

For me and my professional networks, the JCSWB’s distinctive value is not just what it publishes but how it insists that scholarship be made *useful*. Articles need to be accessible in scope, length, and intent to police and public health practitioners, policymakers, as well as communities. That ethos resonates with the makeup of the editorial team, which straddles a professional life well across the law enforcement and public health spheres; – a mix of scholars, academics, and practitioners. It is exemplified by the strong association with the Global Law Enforcement and Public Health Association

(GLEPHA, of which I am the vice president), where it has long been argued that the law enforcement and public health (LEPH) space is itself a discipline of practice, not merely an inter-disciplinary coalition.

## A RESEARCH TRAJECTORY GROUNDED IN THE POLICING OF VULNERABILITY

My own scholarship began with an observation that now reads as obvious but remains practically demanding: *most* police encounters involve vulnerability – whether as victimization, disadvantage, disability, trauma, or institutional contact that amplifies risk. In our programmatic work on policing vulnerability, we sought to re-centre the reality of vulnerability at the onset in training and education. Across a series of texts and studies, the through-line has been consistent: if vulnerability is ubiquitous in policing, then it must be treated as core business, not a specialist niche.

Vulnerability is also *relational* and *contextual*. It is co-produced by policy settings (from diversion policies to bail refusal or conditions or to health access), by community histories (colonial and contemporary), and by institutional design. Bluntly: interactions with vulnerable people dominate policing workloads across international jurisdictions, and the policy response must match that ubiquity with clarity, humility, and resourcing.

The JCSWB has been one of the few journals willing to publish work that inhabits this crossover space without forcing it into narrow disciplinary frameworks. That is not a mere editorial choice; it is how the field has been allowed to mature by the willingness of all actors to see the reality of the field. The JCSWB accompanies that ground-up exercise, and the stubborn refusal of practice and theory pigeon-holing is what I like the most about the journal and its editorial team.

## LAW ENFORCEMENT AND PUBLIC HEALTH AS A SHARED LANGUAGE

The development of the LEPH field since 2012 (effectively: the first LEPH conference in Melbourne) gave many of us the imprimatur for what we had been doing intuitively: naming

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the day-to-day practice where public health and policing meet. The LEPH lens is pragmatic – it asks what kinds of multi-sector arrangements actually reduce harm, support officers and community well-being, and sustain police and public health legitimacy. In the 2020s, that vocabulary keeps on moving from the margins to the main stage: the “mere” policing of vulnerability has become policing *with* health and social care partners toward the overall goal of community safety with health and well-being as its roots. My service on the Board of GLEPHA, the leadership of its Education Special Interest Group, and my service on the editorial team of the journal have deepened my conviction that education, research, and engagement must happen early and be co-produced with those who do the work. The exercise is necessary if we want curricula and scholarship to reflect evidence and lived experience, not just doctrine.

That conviction shaped my editorial, “Towards a holistic approach to policing, community health, and public safety” in *JCSWB* (Bartkowiak-Théron, 2024), where I argued that “holism” is not a rhetorical flourish but rather an operational requirement. Ethical empirical data collection and sharing should feed cross-training and operations that are jointly owned; so should evaluations that track outcomes people actually feel. From an evidence-based perspective, the “quants” are just as important as the “quals” across a vast continuum of cross-disciplinary fields.

## WHAT THE JOURNAL ENABLES: FROM JUSTICE-HEALTH INTERFACES TO PRACTICAL CHANGE

Some of the journal publications mark milestones for the extended health-policing scholarly and practice community. The special issue (9/3, 2024) on trauma-informed practice, following an international conference in Melbourne convened by Prof. Peter Miller from Deakin University, was one of those milestones.

Trauma-informed policing is sometimes caricatured as a “soft” alternative to evidence-based practice. My experience has been the opposite, and I find it only logical that it sustains my educational work on the policing of vulnerable people. Trauma-informed approaches are *evidence-enablers*: they reduce noise in encounters, improve communication and de-escalation, and therefore produce better information, decisions, and outcomes. They also align with a growing recognition, in policing and beyond, that wellness, mental health, and resilience are operational necessities, not afterthoughts. Embedding trauma-informed content in recruit training is one piece of a wider systems change toward psychologically safe, ethically reflexive policing. With Cameron Atkinson, I reported on the co-designed Tasmanian recruit curriculum that brings trauma-informed principles to the beginning of police education. The evaluation now suggests strong receptivity among recruits and reinforced a wider point: trauma-informed policing supports *both* community members and officers. It equips police as early as recruit-training stage to recognize signs of trauma, understand its behavioural effects, and respond appropriately, while making officer well-being and resilience an organizational responsibility. The evaluation data are promising, but importantly, the curriculum has normalized conversations about trauma

among recruits and instructors, positioning empathy as a professional skill.

Furthermore, trauma-informed practice sustains even bail decisions, often framed as purely judicial, although they reverberate across health and social systems. Emma Colvin and I showed why “community safety” must be accounted for in public health terms: remand prior to bail hearings increases system load (2022). It changes public health service access patterns and affects the health trajectories of individuals and families. When justice levers are pulled, health systems move. Policymakers cannot ignore this duality.

Taken together, these pieces embody *JCSWB*’s purpose: to translate these inter-disciplinary concepts into institutionally actionable knowledge. The impact of the journal has not been limited to publication: it has influenced training conversations, informed operational priorities, and, perhaps most importantly, created a record of *how* to do cross-sector work without diluting professional integrity.

## “WITH” NOT “ABOUT”: THE ETHICS AND METHOD OF CO-PRODUCTION

I have argued throughout my career that *relevant* policing scholarship can only be done *with* police officers and organizations, not merely *about* them. My rationale is three-fold, and you will be hard-pressed to change my mind.

First, without access to the tacit knowledge of practitioners and the operational contexts in which decisions are made, research risks mistaking policy for practice and design for delivery. Shadowing methods and embedded research or education, when done ethically and with curiosity rather than judgment, capture what formal and traditional practices cannot (Bartkowiak-Théron & Sappey, 2012). Second, we all have an ethical responsibility toward our involvement in the policing field. Police officers also experience vulnerability and trauma. Co-production acknowledges officers’ human realities and aims for mutual benefit: research and education that supports community well-being as well as practitioner well-being (Hesketh, 2018). Finally, on the overall important buzzword of “impact”: evidence is only “evidence” if it is understood and taken up, and as much as possible also generated, by those who make up the field. I spend several weeks with my students in Evidence-Based Policing discussing this. Co-production fosters ownership and accelerates translation from research data to article to operating procedures, from pilot to programmatic responses.

*JCSWB* has consistently made room for this orientation. Its mission, partnerships, and open-access model have made it easier to engage practitioners as co-authors, co-reviewers, and knowledgeable readers. Effectively, the journal helps reduce the friction between scholarship and practice. It has been a long time coming. I thoroughly agree with Ratcliffe on this: we need more pracademics to fill that space (Ratcliffe, 2026).

## WHAT CHANGED OVER THE DECADE: FROM “PROOF OF CONCEPT” TO FIELD NORMS

Ten years ago, the field of LEPH, in which I am now so involved, was still proving itself. Today, it is a common frame for national conferences, curriculum reform, and policy initiatives. We have seen the following:

- The mainstreaming of vulnerability and equity as core policing, community safety, and well-being concerns. Once sidelined as “special populations,” vulnerable people are now recognized as central to daily workload and legitimacy.
- A maturing conversation on LEPH education. Research on joined up, cross-field LEPH education is still in its infancy and much remains to be done for it to take its full place in our education landscape. However, it already includes an increasing number of analyses of training dynamics (see the works of Inga Heyman, the Edinburgh Napier University) and the integration of higher education in policing. These developments make room for complex content early in the professional life course.
- Cross-sector policy debates that take systems seriously. Health–justice interfaces are starting to routinely ask: what are the health impacts? the social costs? the inter-agency dependencies? That shift, visible throughout the *JCSWB* pages, has moved the conversation beyond crime rates to lived outcomes (I am grateful for lived experience advocates pointing this out in my research work with them).

The journal has refused to be a bystander in these changes. Its editorial choices have legitimated practical, co-authored, methodologically plural research that many traditional journals would have resisted.

## UNFINISHED WORK: CHALLENGES FOR THE NEXT DECADE

The work accomplished over the last decade is undeniable. It is, however, not the time to just sit in deep introspection and complacency, as there remains lots of work to do to challenge a status quo in several domains. This is precisely where the *JCSWB* can continue to lead.

The domain of an evidence-based LEPH is an important area that requires a significant amount of attention. Too many promising initiatives remain small, at the pilot stage, or dependent on the energy and passion of an individual. We need implementation science tailored to community safety as an all-encompassing community of practice: fidelity metrics, adaptation guidance, and cost–benefit analyses that speak to cabinet tables and command teams alike. *JCSWB* can commission methodological pieces or some special issues that give agencies the “how” of scaling without losing integrity.

Cross-sector studies remain one of the most complex domains of enquiry in our field. Practice across different, inter-dependent agencies depends on the right data, shared judiciously and ethically. We need interoperable data standards and governance frameworks that share risk with care at the centre of a holistic analysis, dutifully acknowledge privacy and consent, and support local problem-solving. The journal’s multi-sector readership is an asset for convening these discussions.

The evidence is clear that unaddressed trauma and chronic stress harm practitioners and communities. We must move beyond wellness “add-ons” to an integration of well-being design choices – staffing, supervision, debriefing, training, and career pathways – that are explicitly trauma-informed and resilience-building. The journal has seen

an increase in the number of articles submitted on the topic in the last 5 years. I welcome this and would only support further shining an honest light on those who are at the centre of community safety and well-being. Not only that, but making them co-designers, co-analysts, and co-authors – not just research subjects. The normalization of practitioner-authorship models and peer-review practices can only go toward valuing expertise and guide researchers on being further embedded in the field.

And if you would allow me, I would like to finish on what I think are important future developments in vulnerability and community-safety education. The policing of vulnerability is profoundly shaped by colonial histories and socially constructed discourse. Scholarship in the next decade should therefore insist on further embedding contexts and lived experiences in teaching, learning, and research. These approaches should also turn to and embrace Indigenous communities and the Global South knowledges, not merely translate Northern frameworks outward. The journal provides opportunities to sustain this effort.

## WHAT I HAVE LEARNED: PRINCIPLES FOR DOING THE WORK

Reflecting on my own journey and watching *JCSWB* publications and broader scholarship develop across the LEPH have taught me several things.

- *Start with humility.* Police, health workers, and community members are already solving problems. Scholarship should document, test, and strengthen that effort, not overwrite it. Listen (this is why shadowing and embedded methods matter.)
- *Balance evidence and empathy.* Trauma-informed practice is not anti-evidence; it *improves* decision quality and outcomes. Build empathy into practice (including research), evaluate it rigorously, and report it transparently, with a broad audience in mind.
- *Work “with,” not “on.”* Co-production is an ethic, a method, and a pathway to implementation (Hesketh, 2018). Partner early, share authorship, and align incentives so that publication is only one step in a longer change process.
- *Hold systems accountable to people.* If a justice decision increases health harms, or a health policy creates policing pressure points, say so – and publish where both sectors will read it. The *JCSWB* has allowed many of us to do so (Bartkowiak-Théron & Colvin, 2022).

## CONCLUSION: THE NEXT TEN YEARS, TOGETHER

What gives me the greatest hope as the journal enters its next decade is not any single article or special issue. It is rather the journal’s cultivated habit of cross-sector conversation that treats practice as knowledge, lived experience as expertise worthy of documentation, and collaboration as the default. My own contributions are small pieces of that larger mosaic. They were made possible by partnerships that have thrived and been supported by the platform *JCSWB* provided and by a growing global movement that sees safer, healthier communities as *shared enterprise*. The work ahead is bright:

measure what works, address what harms, and keep building systems that recognize vulnerability without reproducing it. Scholarship can help – only if we write *with* each other. Happy anniversary, *JCSWB*.

#### CONFLICT OF INTEREST DISCLOSURES

The author is a contributing editor of the Journal.

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