

Why should we pay attention to power within co-production research and integrated knowledge translation?

Holmes, Bev¹, Lang, Iain², McCutcheon, Chris³, Kothari, Anita⁴, **Graham, Ian**³

¹ *Michael Smith Foundation for Health Research, Vancouver, Canada*

² *PenCLAHRC, Exeter, United Kingdom*

³ *Ottawa Hospital Research Institute, Ottawa, Canada*

⁴ *Western University, London, Canada*

Background

The co-production of research – where researchers partner with knowledge users through the research process — is gaining increasing attention in health-related work. This is a decades-old practice with roots in community-based participatory-action research (CBPAR) approaches and more recently known by other names including engaged scholarship, co-production of knowledge and integrated knowledge translation. The literature supporting the improvement of co-production practices is growing but little attention has so far been paid to potential power imbalances among co-production participants.

Objectives

Since co-production is a partnership, power relationships are critical for all participants and stakeholders. Drawing on theory and practice, the purpose of this discussion paper is to further define power as related to the co-production of health research; describe how it operates among and between various participant groups (laypersons, researchers, practitioners, administrators); and provide recommendations for achieving equitable partnerships.

Method

Through examining scenarios, we identify unique issues related to formal and informal power in a range of co-production approaches that must be addressed for these research partnerships to achieve their potential through just means.

Results

We suggest that existing strategies aimed at creating true co-production do not fully acknowledge the power structures that exist within and beyond health research. Finally, we advocate for the study of co-production in action to help improve this important, growing area.

Conclusions

Attending to power imbalances at each stage of the research process is crucial in co-production. All participants should be aware of the implications of power imbalances, and be supported to achieve and maintain a balance of power.