ANROWS's approach to knowledge translation and exchange: What is it and how is it done?

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Abstract

Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) was established by the Council of Australian Governments as an initiative under the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022. Specifically, it was established by COAG to:

- lead national efforts to enhance the research base in the areas of domestic violence, family violence and sexual assault across research, education and service delivery organisations, to support the National Plan;

- focus on translating evidence into information to support ongoing improvements in the work of practitioners; and

- inform policy development and service delivery responses. (COAG, 2012)

To give effect to these roles, ANROWS developed a conceptual model of its research role comprising three core, intersecting functions and structured its operations around them and shown in figure 1.

Figure 1: ANROWS conceptual and operating model

These three equally important functions are:

- leadership;
- knowledge production; and
- knowledge translation and exchange.

In this brief paper, I focus particularly on knowledge translation and exchange, hereafter referred to as "KTE". Of the three core functions, KTE is perhaps the least obvious in its purpose and implementation. Before I expand on KTE, however, I will briefly sketch ANROWS's approach to its leadership and knowledge production functions, bearing in mind that they intersect with each other, and with KTE.

Leadership

ANROWS's first task was to establish the National Research Agenda to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children (the National Research Agenda). Its purpose is to guide ANROWS, and other research organisations, on policy and practice-relevant areas on which to focus research into the near future. The National Research Agenda was the product of analyses of gaps in the current state of knowledge on violence against women in the Australian context; and extensive consultation with practitioners, policy-makers and researchers across the country. The National Research Agenda is the authoritative source of information on gaps in knowledge on violence against women in Australia and it has a critical role in supporting the implementation of the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children.

From the National Research Agenda, and in close consultation with stakeholders in all Australian jurisdictions, ANROWS identified the research priorities for its first program of research; the ANROWS Research Program 2014-2016.

Since announcing its own program of research, ANROWS has promoted the National Research Agenda to numerous research and related bodies to maximise the co-ordination of policy and practice-relevant research effort on violence against women in Australia. This includes major research funding bodies such as the Australian Research Council and the National Health and Medical Research Council, as well as the Australian Institute for Family Studies and the National Disability Insurance Agency, for example.

ANROWS is also monitoring and reporting on violence against women research funded by research organisations other than ANROWS.

Knowledge production

ANROWS's knowledge production work involves many individuals and organisations at many levels. First, it currently has a program of research funded by the Commonwealth and all eight state and territory governments of Australia. The program comprises 20 projects valued at $3.5 million. It is worth noting that ANROWS received meritorious grant applications totalling $15 million in its first grant round in 2014, highlighting the volume of work that needs to be done, and resourced.

ANROWS also collaborates with individual jurisdictions and researchers to produce knowledge. Major current examples of this include:

- the collaboration between the Victorian Government, ANROWS and the University of Melbourne to deliver the Victorian Family Violence Index; and

- the collaboration with the Commonwealth Government to deliver a program of research to support the implementation of the National Outcome Standards for Perpetrator Interventions, which were announced by COAG in December.

ANROWS estimates that there are over 100 individuals in academic, policy and practice roles collaborating with ANROWS on the delivery of this program of research. ANROWS recognises and values evidence from multiple sources, including practice wisdom, and inter-disciplinary and cross-sector knowledge production. We actively encourage and facilitate collaborations between academics, practitioners and policy-makers through a Networking Database, available on the ANROWS website.

Let me now turn to the focus of this paper, knowledge translation and exchange.

Knowledge translation and exchange (KTE) – what is it?

Knowledge translation and exchange (KTE) is an emerging practice and field of inquiry, particularly as it now moves beyond medicine and primary health, where it has been the subject of academic inquiry since the 1970s.

Essentially, it is the process of translating knowledge in ways that facilitate the uptake of evidence in policy and practice. It sounds deceptively simple.

Knowledge translation is defined by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) as:

> *a dynamic and iterative process that includes synthesis, dissemination, exchange and ethically-sound application of knowledge …* (http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/29418.html. Accessed: 15 February 2016).

Further, the CIHR website, citing Graham (2010), recognises:
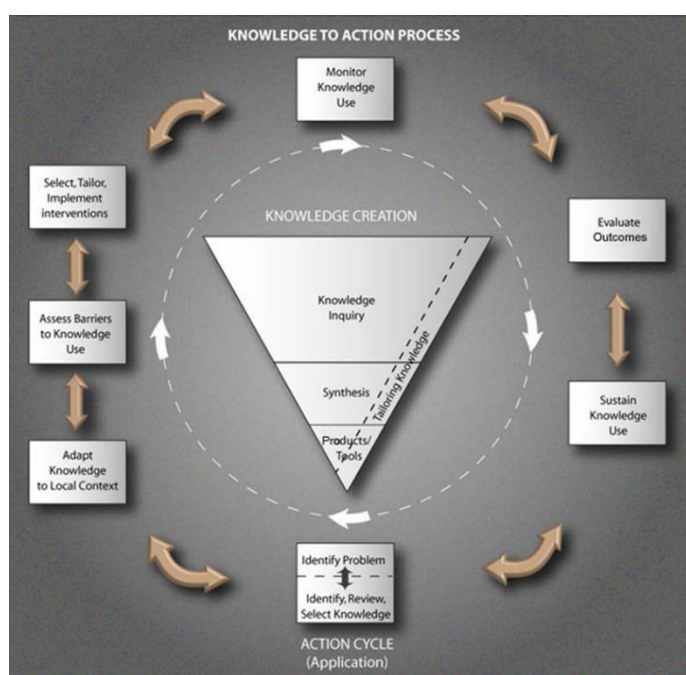
> *This process takes place within a complex system of interactions between researchers and knowledge users which may vary in intensity, complexity and level of engagement depending on the nature of the research and the findings as well as the needs of the particular knowledge user.*

KTE – how do we do it?

In 2014, ANROWS commissioned a review of the evidence on knowledge translation and exchange in the violence against women field. The research team reviewed the international KTE literature and 24 studies in the violence against women field, which met the inclusion criteria for the review.

The review incorporated the Knowledge to Action (KTA) framework published by Graham and his nursing scientist colleagues in 2006 to provide a map of the KTE process. This framework is well-established in the KTE literature, particularly in the fields of health promotion and implementation science (e.g. Field et al 2014). It represents the dynamic and iterative process of KTE in the complex system of interactions between knowledge creators and knowledge users, described on the CIHR website. The KTA framework is shown in figure 2.

Figure 2: Knowledge to action process

Used with permission: Lost in knowledge translation: Time for a map? Graham ID, et al. Journal of Continuing Education in the Health Professions, 26(1). Copyright © 2006. The Alliance for Continuing Education in the Health Professions, The Society for Academic Continuing Medical Education, and The Association for Hospital Medical Education.

At the centre of the diagram is the "knowledge creation funnel", demonstrating three phases in the process of distilling and funnelling knowledge into action, tailored to meet the needs of the knowledge users. Seven bi-directional action phases are situated around the knowledge creation funnel. The inner circle indicates the opportunity for knowledge creation to influence action at several points.

The review conducted by Spalding et al (2015) for ANROWS identified multiple theoretical models of KTE, such as: science push; demand pull; dissemination; and interaction, in which knowledge users (policy-makers and practitioners, for example) are involved in various ways in knowledge production. The review research team applied categories of KTE strategies proposed by KTE scholars Strauss, Tetroe and Graham (2013), and summarised by the CIHR as:

- educational interventions;

- linkage and exchange interventions;

- feedback interventions;

- electronic interventions;

- patient-mediated interventions; and

- organisational interventions.

Most of the 24 violence against women studies included in the ANROWS review related to KTE for health professionals and only one was aimed at policy-makers. Most used a pre and post-test repeated measures design to identify within-subject changes following the KTE intervention.

The most commonly used KTE strategies reported in the 24 studies reviewed were:

- educational (staff training);

- patient-mediated interventions (e.g. provision of resources in response to routine screening for intimate partner violence);

- organisational interventions (practice guidelines); and

- linkage and exchange interventions.

Spalding et al (2015) concluded that their review of 24 relevant studies "revealed a limited evidence base in KTE strategies within the fields of domestic violence and sexual assault" (p. 18). However, while noting that "the evidence for particular strategies in overcoming barriers to implementation is incomplete" (p. 18), and drawing on the work of Grimshaw et al (2012) in summarising the results of systematic reviews, Spalding et al (2015) identify the following potentially useful KTE strategies for work towards ameliorating and preventing violence against women.

Potentially useful KTE strategies

Potentially useful strategies listed by Spalding et al (2015) and their key features are listed in table 1.

Table 1: Potentially useful KTE strategies in violence against women field

Strategy	Features
• Informal opinion leaders	Social accessibility and competence
• Educational meetings, outreach and printed materials	Interactive training in the practice setting
• Audit and feedback	Measuring and reporting on clinical performance
• Reminders	Prompting target population on performance expectations
• Tailored strategies	Designed to specifically address barriers to change
• Multi-faceted interventions.	Consideration is given to the interaction of multiple strategies for maximum benefit

The role of evidence in government policy-making

Our approach can also be informed by the analysis of Benoit Gauthier, President of the Canadian Evaluation Society, on the impact of evidence on government policy. In an article soon to be published in *Evaluative Voices 2*, Gauthier argues that there is no such thing as evidenced-based policy; rather, evidence is part of a policy-making equation and the literature on the topic now tends to talk about evidence-informed policy. Further, Gauthier says there are factors that can increase the chances of evidence being used in the policy-making process, when we understand the range of components of policy impact. Gauthier breaks this down to an equation: impact = content x influence, where content has four, and influence has five, separate components. Figure 3 shows the equation with all nine components.

Figure 3: Impact = content x influence

Adapted from Gauthier, B. (in press)

Table 2 summarises the conditions required for each component to achieve impact.

Table 2: Components of content and influence

Component	Definition/condition
Content	
1. Quantity	Evidence must exist
2. Quality	Defines volume of content, but is to some extent subjective and relates to the claims made on the basis of the evidence
3. Accessibility	Presentation of content must be adapted, tailored and packaged for intended users
4. Congruency	Degree of congruence, or cognitive dissonance, with target users existing beliefs
Influence	
1. Credibility	The user's perception of the credibility of the source
2. Congruency	The degree of congruence or dissonance (e.g. ideological) between the source and the aims of the user
3. Timeliness	The convergence of need and availability of the evidence
4. Self-scrutiny	Readiness to question current approach and openness to change
5. Expediency	Need for user to address time constraints and manage public relations

Although Gauthier's analysis is specifically focused on government policy making, the impact equation seems equally relevant to evidence-informed practice.

Integrated and interactive knowledge translation for policy and practice

One way to address many of the components in Gauthier's equation is to integrate the research and KT processes, through involvement of the intended evidence users throughout the evidence production process. Longitudinal KT studies conducted by Driedger et al. (2010) and Wathen et al. (2011), address the importance of integration and interaction in the evidence building and KT processes. Driedger et al (2010) find, however, that uptake of evidence is also influenced by environmental (or context) factors such as access to resources, training and so on, and the "dose" of the KT intervention (e.g. number, length and quality of the interventions).

Similarly, Wathen et al's (2011) longitudinal study on KTE in the violence against women field concluded that "talk, trust and time" are significant drivers of new knowledge being taken up by its critical users. In particular, frontline workers with women highly valued the respectful communication of research findings, and the "efforts to present findings in ways most useful to them" (p.11). This contributed to making new knowledge credible and trustworthy.

While integrated research to policy and practice models have their strengths, Wathen et al (2011) emphasise the importance of ongoing interaction with various types of evidence users to ensure KT is tailored and able to "address the complexities and particularities of specific contexts… [and]…the interaction of contextual factors with 'evidence'" (p. 14).

Further research

Many of the KT studies in the violence against women field, including Spalding et al (2015) in their review for ANROWS, identify the need for further research in this particular area. Wathen et al (2011) conclude that "new theories and methodologies that can assess and explain 'knowledge mobilisation' as a construct related to, but distinct from, current 'knowledge translation' approaches are required" (p. 14).

KTE – ANROWS's approach

ANROWS's KTE functions are principally governed by its strategic goal to "ensure the effective dissemination and utilisation of research findings". Note there are two aspects of the goal:

1. dissemination; and
2. utilisation.

Knowledge dissemination strategy and activities

The dissemination strategy to achieve the strategic goal is:

- employing innovative, targeted communication strategies that are fit-for-purpose to disseminate national and international research on domestic and family violence and sexual assault.

Dissemination activities include:

- the fortnightly publication "ANROWS Notepad" listing new research
- regular updates of the ANROWS resource database to include new national and international research
- publication of ANROWS research papers and reports on the ANROWS website
- e-alerts to subscribers when new publications are available on the website
- public events (workshops, seminars and lectures)
- "In-conversation" recordings of interviews with international scholars available on the website.

Knowledge utilisation strategy and activities

The strategy for knowledge utilisation is:

- maximising the effective translation of research into practice by promoting partnerships and knowledge networks between researchers, policy makers and practitioners.

To date, utilisation <u>activities</u> have included:

- encouraging and facilitating, through the ANROWS Networking database, inter-disciplinary and cross-sector collaborations;

- co-convened events hosted by ANROWS and relevant state or territory ministers to consider policy and practice implications of ANROWS research;

- quarterly teleconference meetings with a network of National Plan senior officials, representing all 9 Australian jurisdictions;

- the ANROWS Practitioner Engagement Group comprising 30 members including representatives of national and state or territory peak bodies; and

- the inaugural ANROWS conference "Research to policy and practice", which aimed to go beyond the presentation of research findings. It invited strategic thinking and action, over the duration of the conference and beyond, translating the evidence into policy and practice.

ANROWS and the impact equation

Through its KTE activities, and in relation to Gauthier's impact equation, ANROWS is, to a greater or lesser degree, increasing the quantity and quality of evidence in the violence against women field, and producing evidence that responds to identified stakeholder priorities in a timely manner.

ANROWS is also adapting, tailoring and packaging evidence to increase accessibility. Its credibility is strong, due to the strength of internal and external expertise, our research and practice partners, engaged in the production of knowledge.

The commonwealth, state and territory governments, having established ANROWS under the first action plan of the National Plan, appear committed to self-scrutiny and open to change. The non-government sector also appears ready to question current approaches and adapt, as indicated by 90 applications for 30 positions on the ANROWS Practitioner Engagement Group. Expediency for the end user is of course beyond ANROWS's control.

Further, ANROWS encourages and facilitates the integration of research and KT processes, through involvement of intended evidence users in the evidence production process and negotiated dissemination strategies for each research project.

Conclusion

For ANROWS and its research, policy and practice partners there remains a great opportunity to respond to the challenge of Wathen et al (2011) and develop *new theories and methodologies that can assess and explain "knowledge mobilisation"*.

KTE activities can democratise knowledge and enable more stakeholders to build and own knowledge on addressing violence against women. In such a way, KTE and leadership are as central as knowledge production to the ANROWS operational model and practice. This reflects a strategic positioning for KTE in the work of ANROWS, even as its specific approaches

are evolving. ANROWS's KTE function allows it to co-ordinate and build on the existing knowledge held by academics, survivors, service providers, activists and policy advocates.

In linking knowledge production and implementation in this way, we challenge ourselves and each other to innovate, create and employ the best known solutions to violence against women. We provide decision-makers (from the opinion-makers of the media to the decision-takers in government) with a knowledge base they can rely on, as we all work towards ending violence against women and their children in Australia.

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