Transformative Mixed Methods and Policy Evaluation

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Evaluators contribute to policy evaluation both to provide information as to what a policy should include, as well as to determine the effects of policy. Policies are by definition developed within political contexts and thus the decisions that are made about policies are influenced by multiple factors, evaluation evidence being potentially one of those influential factors. Evaluators sometimes express frustration in their attempts to bring evaluative thinking into policy development and policy evaluation (KELLY 2015; SEGONE 2015). Members of government also express frustration because they do not have access to the evidence base that they need to inform policy decisions (COMMISSION ON EVIDENCE-BASED POLICYMAKING 2017). This raises important questions: What counts as evidence in policy evaluation and how can this evidence be integrated effectively into the policy process? How can evaluators hope to influence policy when the leaders of some countries do not want or believe that findings from systematically conducted studies have merit? An answer to the first question is explored below; answers to the second question are more elusive and constitute significant challenges for evaluation professionals. This issue is discussed at greater length later in this article.

1. *Evidence in Policy Making*

The question of what counts as evidence in policy making and how that evidence can be integrated into the policy process is answered in brief in the passage that follows.

If evidence is to have a greater impact on policy and practice, then four key requirements would seem to be necessary before such an agenda can be developed. These key requirements are:

1. Agreement as to what counts as evidence in what circumstances

2. A strategic approach to the creation of evidence in priority areas, with concomitant systematic efforts to accumulate evidence in the form of robust bodies of knowledge

3. Effective dissemination of evidence to where it is most needed and the development of effective means of providing wide access to knowledge

4. Initiatives to ensure the integration of evidence into policy and encourage the utilisation of evidence in practice. (NUTLEY et.al. 2002, 2)

Another characteristic of policy evaluation that has been found to influence policy makers include: tailoring the message to the specific stakeholder group and providing access to an online registry of systematic reviews of policy evaluation studies (DOBBINS et al. 2009). A systematic review of barriers to the use of evidence by policy makers revealed the most frequently cited barriers to use of evaluation findings were poor accessibility to the findings and lack of timeliness in the provision of those findings (OLIVER et al. 2014). Factors that facilitated use of evidence for policy-related purposes included collaboration between evaluators and policymakers and improved relationships and skills. Oliver and colleagues note that a weakness in many policy-related studies is lack of involvement with the policymakers themselves. They suggest a need to obtain information from policymakers as to what they consider to be clear, relevant and reliable data and when and why they would use such data. In this article, I examine how transformative mixed methods evaluation designs can be used to address these important variables that influence use of evaluation findings for policy making.

2. *Transformative Approach to Policy Evaluation*

Transformative mixed methods policy evaluations are associated with the social justice branch of evaluation (MERTENS, WILSON 2012). The transformative approach prioritizes the human rights that are recognized in the United Nations' conventions and declarations that call for respect for the rights of women, people with disabilities, Indigenous communities, and refugees and immigrants. With this lens, the policy analysis starts by examining how policies are either supporting an oppressive status quo or how they can be changed to support human rights. Marra argues that social justice branch policy evaluations must take into account the complexity of the systems in terms of power relationships and how dominant groups may «benefit from denying others access to material and social resources, such as adequate child care, paid work opportunities, or political representation» (MARRA 2015, 32). Thus, evaluation of policies needs to include a critical look at measures that can shift the balance of power such as access to mental health services, stable housing, provision of a living wage, affordable child care, and universal health care.

A transformative approach to policy evaluation can be conceptualized in terms of the assumptions that underlie methodological choices. I explore four sets of assumptions:

- The axiological assumption about the nature of values and ethics
- The ontological assumption about the nature of reality
- The epistemological assumption about the nature of knowledge and the relationship between the knower and that which would be known (i.e., the evaluator and stakeholders)
- The methodological assumption about the nature of systematic inquiry.

Following a brief explanation of each of these assumptions, I discuss the application of a transformative approach to the formulation and evaluation of policies related to the substance abuse crisis in the United States and responses by politicians and the courts. I detail the options available for using a transformative mixed methods approach to evaluating policies and illustrate the options through the use of examples from drug courts and mental health courts in the United States.

2.1. *Transformative Axiological Assumption*

The transformative axiological assumption reflects an awareness of the pervasiveness of discrimination that occurs in many communities and the ethical responsibility of the evaluator to understand critical dimensions of diversity in order to challenge societal processes that perpetuate an oppressive status quo (MERTENS, WILSON 2012; MERTENS 2015). «Respect is critically examined in terms of the cultural norms of interaction in diverse communities and across cultural groups. Beneficence is defined in terms of the promotion of human rights and an increase in social justice. An explicit connection is made between the process and outcomes of evaluation studies and the furtherance of a social justice agenda» (MERTENS 2009, 49 f.). Evaluation of policies from a transformative stance necessitates understanding the multiple cultures that are relevant in terms of who develops the policy, implements the policy, and is affected by the policy.

Transformative evaluators have an explicit mandate to take this a step further by working to transform the status quo (PONTEROTTO 2005). The American Evaluation Association (AEA) revised its guiding principles in 2004 to include an explicit statement about the importance of recognizing diversity and acting in an ethically responsible and culturally competent manner. In 2011, AEA published a *Statement on Cultural Competence* that calls upon evaluators to engage in a constant state of learning in order to guard against being blinded by their own assumptions that differ from those of the stakeholders whose backgrounds are different from their own. Thus, the transformative axiological assumption directs the evaluator

to design the evaluation in a way that facilitates the identification of actions that can be taken to move society towards greater justice.

2.2. *Transformative Ontological Assumption*

The transformative ontological assumption recognizes the multi-faceted nature of reality. Human beings often believe that they know what is real, but each concept of what is real is influenced by the positionality of the person. A person who is in a position of unearned privilege by virtue of skin color, gender, or lack of a disability might hold one version of reality. However, a person who is not in that privileged position may hold quite a different version of reality. For example, privileged politicians may see substance abuse as a criminal matter, whilst drug addicts and their families may view it as a mental health and/or economic issue.

The evaluator's responsibility is to design studies in ways that make visible the differences in perspectives about what is real, the factors that influence those perceptions (e.g., poverty, education, gender, race/ethnicity, religion), and then critically examine the consequences of accepting one version of reality over another. History is replete with examples of the acceptance of the privileged views of reality and the harmful consequences of that action. In the United States, Native American Indians were taken from their families and forced to relinquish all aspects of their culture in the US government's attempt to "civilize" them, resulting in high suicide rates and drug abuse. This concept of ontology comes into play in evaluation work when evaluators encourage stakeholders to critically examine their own assumptions about the target population and the interventions and to obtain data from the targeted population on these topics as well.

2.3. *Transformative Epistemological Assumption*

Epistemologically, knowledge is not viewed as absolute nor relative; it is created within a context of power and privilege. Evaluators need to develop respectful and collaborative relationships that are culturally responsive to the needs of the various stakeholder groups in order to establish conditions conducive to revealing knowledge from different positions. Tensions can arise because of the power differences and the challenge of working through sensitive issues related to discrimination and oppression. The evaluator needs to develop effective communication strategies in order to navigate the inherently political terrain of an evaluation study.

2.4. *Transformative Methodological Assumption*

The transformative methodological assumption does not dictate any particular approach to policy evaluation. «Rather, methodological decisions are aimed at

determining the approach that will best facilitate use of the process and findings to enhance social justice; identify the systemic forces that support the status quo and those that will allow change to happen; and acknowledge the need for a critical and reflexive relationship between the evaluator and the stakeholders» (MERTENS, WILSON 2012, 172). Mixed methods are often used in transformative evaluations because of the need to establish a dialogic relationship along with a deep contextual understanding. Qualitative and quantitative methods can be used together because they reveal different aspects of the phenomenon under study and are responsive to different information needs of the various stakeholder groups. «The methods used need to capture the contextual complexity and be appropriate to the cultural groups in the evaluation. A cyclical design can be used to make use of interim findings throughout the evaluation study. And follow-up is needed to facilitate use to enhance the potential for the program evaluation findings to achieve the strengthening of human rights» (MERTENS 2013, 33). This supports the credibility of findings because the stakeholders are engaged throughout the process and their perspectives are reflected in respectful ways. In the next section, I review the literature that explores the policies that the United States has implemented to address mental illness and substance abuse with reflections on how those policies can inform future transformative evaluation designs.

3. *Transformative Evaluation and Substance Abuse Policy in the United States*

Two parallel tracks have characterized the United States policies regarding substance abuse and mental health: being "tough on crime" and treating it as a criminal offense versus seeing it as a mental health issue that can be addressed through diversion programs. A transformative evaluation of these policies would begin with a contextual analysis that would provide data about the historical aspects of these policies and help to identify the multiple cultures that are relevant in the policy formulation and implementation. A historical analysis reveals that in the 1980s and 1990s, the United States policy on substance abuse was labeled the "war on drugs" (WASHINGTON POST 2015). The policies included harsh sentencing policies with mandatory minimum lengths for sentencing, resulting in mass incarceration for many nonviolent offenders.

> «The nation's prison and jail population today is 2.3 million, more than quadruple the number that were incarcerated in 1980 [...]. Sixty percent of prisoners today are people of color. One in three black men face the likelihood of imprisonment, and black men are six times as likely to be incarcerated as white men, while Hispanic men are 2.5 times as likely» (WASHINGTON POST 2015, 1 f.).

This contextual analysis provides insights not only into the effect of criminalizing drug use, but also into the racial and ethnic disparities that resulted from implementing the policy, critical issues when considering transformative evaluation design. President Obama stopped using the term "war on drugs" in 2009 and introduced policies that did not require the same types of mandatory sentencing guidelines.

Policies concerning substance abuse are complicated when the offender also has a serious mental illness. Data from the National Institute of Justice indicate that approximately 60% of adults test positive for drug use at the time of arrest, and that over half of those in prisons are drug dependent or have alcohol addiction (COWELL et. al. 2004). In addition, 72% of those incarcerated with serious mental illness have a co-occurring substance abuse disorder (COWELL et al. 2004; CRISANTI et al. 2014). Data on the prevalence of the co-occurrence of mental illness and substance abuse provided support for the passage of America's Law Enforcement and Mental Health Act (Public Law106-515, 2000) which authorized federal funding for mental health courts or jail diversion programs (SLATE 2003). A jail diversion program is defined as follows:

«The term "jail diversion" refers to programs that divert people with SMI [serious mental illness] and often CODs [co-occurring disorders] in contact with the justice system from jail and provide linkages to community-based treatment and support services. The person thus avoids or spends a significantly reduced time in jail and/or lockups on the current charge or on violations of probation resulting from previous charges» (CRISANTI et al. 2014, 773).

Initially, legislators attached no money to this law, however, Congress did authorize $4 million to be spent by the attorney general's office to support the mental health courts. In 2004, Congress allocated $5 million to fund the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Agency's initiative to divert people with mental illness from the criminal justice system.

Mental health courts are quite diverse in how they are structured and how they respond to people who have mental illness and a problem with substance abuse. My personal observation of a mental health court in Salem OR aligned with this description of the process:

«Participation from all of the key players from the initial planning processes for the mental health court to periodic meetings and evaluation after the court is operating; generally, among the key players can be, of course, the presiding judge and his or her immediate staff, clinical caseworkers and administrators linked to public and/or private mental health care providers in the community, representatives from both the prosecution and the defense, law enforcement personnel to include jail administrators,

sometimes probation officials, mental health advocates, and consumers of mental health services» (SLATE 2003, 17).

This intensive support circle around each person is a completely different version of reality about what is appropriate treatment for a person who has a substance abuse problem and is mentally ill, especially as compared to the "war on drugs" version. In an interview with Marion County Mental Health Court Judge Mary James conducted on September 17, 2017, she described the implications of accepting the version of reality that people with mental illness and substance abuse issues need comprehensive support:

«What we know is that people with mental illness can't change as easily as other people e.g., drug addicts can stay clean and stay away from triggers and it makes sense in a linear way. This is not the case for many people with mental illness; we can use the model from drug courts but not as a cookie cutter for mental health court. It is far more important to spend energy on community support, medication compliance, and to be really candid with people about what that involves and how difficult it can be. For us, the biggest challenge for some of our participants is economic diversity, homelessness, and poverty. One woman with a serious mental illness and history of drug abuse was neglecting her children. So we told her she needed to go to parenting classes, but she is working at two jobs. She misses the parenting classes and her probation appointments. Looking at sanctioning someone who is trying to put bread on the table is really hard. But if she gets through this program she is not going to prison and may get better parenting skills. How can we help her economically? Can we help with housing vouchers? Food boxes? So she can avoid working two jobs and missing treatments and probation meetings» (Judge Mary James, Interview notes, 2017).

Such data need to be collected to provide a clear picture of the choices that are made in the implementation of policy in order to support inclusion of provisions in the policy that are needed for an effective program. Evidence is needed to support the need for inclusion of the full range of support services, including peer mentors who can be a guide for the participants throughout the length of the program. The policy then needs to include financial resources to support the range of services and personnel.

Research on the variables that influence the effectiveness of mental health courts indicates the comprehensiveness of the services is not the only important variable, rather, how the person is treated in their interactions with the court is also critically important. «Judges' experiences and research from other contexts have shown that the quality of interaction between judges and participants and the tone of the court proceedings are at least as important» (FISLER 2015, 12). When the participants in mental health courts perceive that the judge is treating

them with respect and that they are being treated fairly, then their cooperation with the court mandates increases. Judge James expressed this as follows:

«What is interesting is that what some studies tell us is that it is not so much that they are in treatment that makes the difference. It is more about the nature of their contact with the court. It is not that the type of treatment intervention is not as important, but it is more impactful that people feel the judge and others pay attention to them and help them adopt behaviors that make their lives better. The amount of contact with the judge is important; the tone of the court is important. There is a perception of fairness. For me, empirically, my own experience is consistent with that research. I have had people say "I have never felt listened to before." "You people have supported me in ways I never felt supported." "You changed my life." What we try to do is have a positive relationship with them, since many people in their lives have given up on positive relationships. For some of our participants, their families could use as much support as the participants are getting from us. If they have family support we encourage that, but families cannot always understand that they are not helping. It could be the persons they are living with have their own mental health challenges. A parent may not be able to accept that their child needs to have medication to help them. We have a man who is still making up his mind; he is not prepared to take medication; mom says why should he have to take meds? Because he continues to commit crimes; he has no impulse control; we are hoping that meds and counseling will help him. One thing that is helpful for participants is them knowing that they are being listened to and they are not stigmatized». (Judge Mary James, Interview Notes, 2017)

Thus, the collection of data about the quality of the interactions in the courtroom is important. Diversity within the pool of mental health participants is another factor that needs to be considered when planning for data collection. Collection of data from people in the diversion programs need to be conducted with a clear understanding of the contextual and cultural issues that impact people's willingness and ability to provide such data. People who are engaged in illegal activities, living in poverty, homeless, or highly mobile in terms of residence may not be willing or may not be accessible to the evaluator (CRISANTI et al. 2014). These characteristics may increase the challenge of collecting data over an extended period of time in order to show longitudinal effects of the program. Also, people with serious mental illness may be suspicious, delusional or fearful of someone who says that they want to interview them. Others may feel that they are ashamed to participate in the study because they have relapsed or are incarcerated because of a more recent offense. Or, they may simply be overwhelmed with the demands of everyday life that can be exacerbated by being in a state of crisis or trying to maneuver through the legal system. Judge James

also pointed out another complicating dimension of diversity related to sexual orientations. She said:

> «Sexual orientation issues can complicate provision of appropriate services, especially when the member of a sexual minority is afraid to discuss their sexuality in open court. For example, one of our participants was in abusive relationships. He is gay and was trolling in bars; he would come to court with black eyes. I said, "You need to go to the Center for Hope and Safety, they have domestic violence services specific to same sex relationships. We are aware there is a different dynamic for you." We try to work with community providers to be responsive to people who have dysfunctional family dynamics, economic challenges, and abusive relationships». (Judge Mary James, Interview Notes, 2017)

Another group that requires attention for culturally appropriate interventions are veterans. Judge James described their issues in this way:

> «One of the unique groups is veterans who come in with traumatic experiences different from people who have not been through war and conflicts. PTSD is one of the reasons we can't plop these people into regular criminal court. We could not be successful if we didn't have community service providers who are culturally aware and if we ourselves do not obtain regular and appropriate training on cultural diversity, implicit bias, and procedural justice. We could only help people who are just like me. If mental illness is treated in a restorative way and by accepting the responsibility to take a more restorative justice approach, we are going to have people who come out of a criminal justice system with a better feel for how to move forward as part of the community». (Judge Mary James, Interview Notes, 2017)

Other important dimensions of diversity in this context include persons whose home language is not English, persons with developmental delays, and those who have experienced trauma (e.g., sexual abuse) in their past. Evaluators need to be sensitive to the diversity within the population and of the effects of attrition on the quality of the data that are collected to demonstrate the program's effectiveness as part of a policy evaluation study.

Additional data are needed that indicate the effectiveness of the programs that are funded under the policy initiatives. These can include data about the effects of the program in terms of reduced rates of recidivism, substance abuse, and improved functioning and quality of life. Prior research on mental health programs support their effectiveness on these measures (FISLER 2015). However, little research has been conducted as to the reasons that people do not complete their mental health court programs. Insights that bear further investigation are offered by Judge James when she noted that some people choose to accept their jail

time because it is less time than is required by the 18-month commitment of mental health court.

Another very important part of transformative policy evaluation comes in the form of cost effectiveness studies that can provide an estimate of the impact of the diversion on costs and outcomes of the programs (COWELL et al. 2004). Cost analysis is an element of policy evaluation that goes beyond consideration of the effectiveness of the program itself. Diversion programs are cost intensive; however, such a study could provide evidence of cost advantages in terms of reducing court dockets and over-crowding in jails and prisons.

It is important to note that there are two major types of criminal justice diversion programs that have implications for determining costs: pre-booking and post-booking. Pre-booking means that the diversion occurs before the person is formally charged and is generally carried out by specially trained police officers. Post-booking diversion programs are applied after the person has been booked and they are either in jail or in arraignment court.

Cowell et al. (2004) conducted a cost effectiveness study of diversion programs that serve persons with serious mental illness and co-occurring substance abuse as a way of providing information to policymakers about the allocation of scarce resources. Policy makers need to know «how much jail diversion costs and how that cost compares to the alternatives» (COWELL et al. 2004, 294). They compared programs that were pre- and post-booking at four sites in the United States.

The cost data were obtained for the criminal justice system and the health care system. The costs included labor, materials, rent, utilities, maintenance and supplies, capital costs, and administrative overhead. The criminal justice costs include the courts, public defenders and prosecutors' offices, the police, and the jail. The health care costs included inpatient mental health services, residential substance abuse care, outpatient care, emergency room care, mental health assessment, and case management. The data were obtained through interviews and use of court and health service records. Comparisons were made between people who were diverted and those who were not diverted. Not surprisingly, higher jail costs were documented for the non-diverted and higher health services costs were documented for the diverted. The results across the sites were mixed; at two of the sites, the diversion program was more cost effective, however, at the other two, higher costs were associated with the diversion program. Fisler also concluded there were mixed results in terms of the cost effectiveness of mental health courts, even though there are consistent findings in terms of their effectiveness on other variables (FISLER 2015).

Cowell et al. (2004) identify limitations of their study in the form of lack of information about how services were delivered in the diversion program. Transformative evaluators would advocate for inclusion of data on the appropriateness of the treatments that are delivered while incarcerated and in the

community. They recommend: «Future research should thus focus on the intersection of three treatment characteristics: what the diverted are being diverted from, what the diverted are being diverted to, and the timing of that diversion in the criminal justice system» (COWELL et al. 2004, 311). This recommendation provides a good segue to discuss what a transformative mixed methods evaluation of policies for people with serious mental illness and co-occurring substance abuse might look like.

4. *Transformative Mixed Methods Design for Policy Evaluation*

In this section, I draw together the methodological implications of the transformative paradigm for an evaluation of policy for programs to serve people with a serious mental illness and a co-occurring substance abuse problem who come into contact with the criminal justice system. Transformative policy evaluations focus on social justice and human rights (MERTENS 2018). As we saw in the example that has been discussed throughout this article, people who have a serious mental illness are marginalized in society. In addition, we have seen that racial/ethnic disparities exist in terms of who is incarcerated and for how long. There are also multiple other dimensions of diversity that influence the collection of data about a program in this context, such as type of mental illness, type of substance abuse, level of poverty, presence of another disability, being a veteran, and being a sexual minority. Thus, the transformative evaluation needs to start at this point: how do the policies either support an oppressive status quo or how do they support human rights? Thus, cultural differences and power relations need to be examined. In cases of policy where inequities are evident, the positions of those who are dominant need to be critically examined to shift the balance of power so that greater justice can prevail.

Guidance for the conduct of a transformative mixed methods policy evaluation includes:

1. Review and synthesize relevant publications, including historical and current policies. This review needs to include notation of the following: a) the cultural specificity and relevance displayed in the policies and other documents such as prior evaluation studies; b) complications introduced by the presence of multi-component interventions (as is the case in the mental illness with co-occurring substance abuse support services in a diversion program); c) evidence that the study findings have influenced policy decisions. This first step will help to identify variables and populations that need to be included, methods that might prove to be appropriate for further data collection, and gaps in what is currently known.

2. The evaluators need to build on existing relationships to identify the organizations and individuals who are affected by the policy and who therefore need

to be included in the evaluation stakeholder groups. The evaluators may be able to use existing data to determine the severity of the problem and to identify the dimensions of diversity in the stakeholder groups that are relevant (e.g., severity and type of mental illness, type of drug abuse, race/ethnicity of the persons in the court, gender). It may be necessary to collect qualitative data through observations of court proceedings and team meetings, as well as through focus groups or individual interviews to obtain a better understanding of the person's experiences with mental illness, drug use, living conditions, and resources and challenges faced. Collection of qualitative data from the court personnel and service providers can also contribute to a better understanding of the phenomenon. With the emphasis on transformative action, policy evaluation also needs to be conducted in ways that create the will for change in order to increase responsiveness to human rights (MERTENS 2018). An important part of this process is inclusion of the appropriate stakeholders in culturally appropriate ways so that all voices can be heard and the safety of the most vulnerable is protected.

3. Plan to include linkages with organizations into the evaluation design in order to reach a broader constituency and increase the probability of use of the findings. This can include connections with service providers, community organizations, the courts and related offices, as well as with policy makers. If a champion policy maker can be found for this issue, then they should be included throughout the process as much as possible. Engagement with these constituencies can occur throughout the process of the evaluation, from the identification of what needs to be evaluated to the collection, interpretation, and use of data and findings. This step is critically important as a potential strategy to influence policy maker and country leaders who do not see the value of systematically collected evidence as a basis for decision making. Political pressure can be brought to bear when significant groups support the development or change in policies.

4. Evaluators should include capacity building throughout the course of the study as another strategy to enhance potential use of the findings for policy purposes. The likelihood of using the evaluation findings increases when evaluators have a clear understanding of the «political environment, policy-making processes, as well as the possession of robust evidence. Further...engagement with the media, networking and advocacy efforts increase the efficacy of efforts to shape policy» (KELLY 2015, 206, cited in MERTENS 2018, 104).

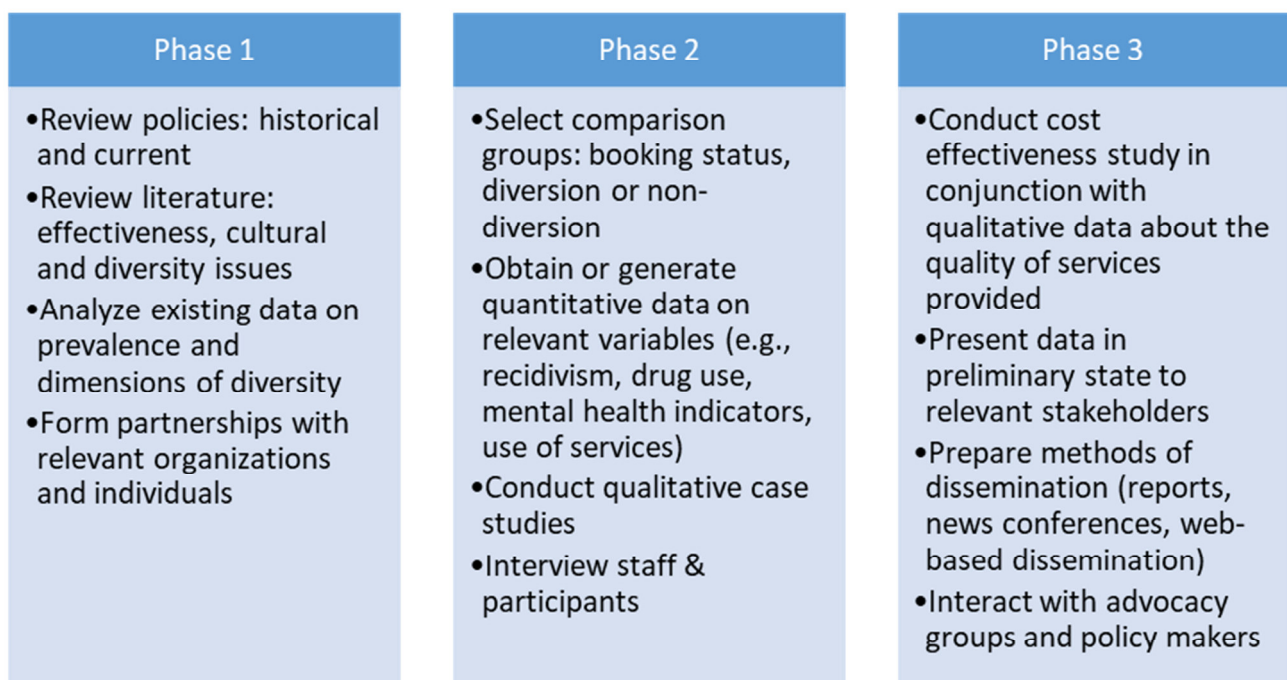| Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
•Review policies: historical and current •Review literature: effectiveness, cultural and diversity issues •Analyze existing data on prevalence and dimensions of diversity •Form partnerships with relevant organizations and individuals	•Select comparison groups: booking status, diversion or non-diversion •Obtain or generate quantitative data on relevant variables (e.g., recidivism, drug use, mental health indicators, use of services) •Conduct qualitative case studies •Interview staff & participants	•Conduct cost effectiveness study in conjunction with qualitative data about the quality of services provided •Present data in preliminary state to relevant stakeholders •Prepare methods of dissemination (reports, news conferences, web-based dissemination) •Interact with advocacy groups and policy makers

Figure 1. *Transformative Mixed Methods Design for Policy Evaluation*

Based on the literature review that is included in this article, the interview data from Judge James, and the general guidance for the planning, implementation, and use of a transformative mixed methods study, I propose the design that is presented in *Figure 1* as a possible way to address the complexity of policy evaluation related to diversion courts for people with mental illness and co-occurring substance abuse. The historical and current review of policies reveals the tension between different versions of reality: criminal offenses or people who need mental health services along with other types of support. The review of the literature and analysis of existing data can reveal gender and racial/ethnic disparities that are present in the criminal justice system. Literature review may well reveal the lack of information about the experiences of people with disabilities or people who are deaf. Effectiveness data is available in the literature, but few of the studies integrate findings from quantitative and qualitative data that can yield valuable insights into the quality of services provided and what is needed for a successful program. The formation of partnerships is crucial at the beginning stages of the study so that a wide range of stakeholders have input into refining the study approach; this has been linked with an increased propensity to use study findings.

The second phase of the study involves the collection of new data that can provide insights into the current status of the programs and the experiences of

those who are part of the court system, service providers, and persons with mental illness and substance abuse problems. The design of the study might well be comparative on the basis of variables that have been identified in the literature such as the booking status and participation in a diversion program or not. Both quantitative and qualitative data can be collected at this stage of the study. It is usually easier to collect quantitative data from larger groups than for qualitative data, so the evaluator needs to be explicit about the sampling strategies used for each stakeholder group and for the type of data that are collected.

The third phase of the study includes the cost effectiveness study as well as plans for analysis, dissemination, and use of the findings. For policy evaluation, it is very important to include the relevant stakeholder groups, including families, advocacy groups, courts, service providers, and policy makers. Engagement with stakeholders is important throughout the evaluation process. If possible, it is excellent to have a policy maker who can act as a champion for bringing the evaluation findings to their peers. At this stage, the stakeholders can be engaged in the interpretation of the data, the formulation of the recommendations, and the plans for further dissemination. If the right amount of attention and pressure are brought to bear on policy makers, the results may be presented at a Congressional hearing and thus have influence on future policies.

5. *Conclusions*

The example used in this article focuses on the use of transformative framework to conduct policy evaluation on the specific issue of diversion courts for people with mental illness and co-occurring substance abuse. However, there are many other wicked problems that societies are facing for which a transformative framework would be appropriate. The world is facing challenges that are complex and without solution in the form of climate change, violence, poverty, lack of access to health and educational services, social and economic inequality, and migration (MERTENS et al. 2016). In order to address policies related to these wicked problems, evaluators will need to:

«address power inequities, violations of human rights and impediments to social justice, and strategizing for action in the form of policies and behaviors. Given the complex nature of wicked problems, future challenges for mixed methods researchers include how to bring multidisciplinary teams together to share their expertise in respectful ways. While this is not a new problem, it is one that continues to challenge researchers and so warrants continued attention by the mixed methods research community» (MERTENS et al. 2016, 225).

Mixed methods has the potential to contribute to finding solutions to wicked problems because it stimulates new kinds of questions and involves the use of innovations in methodology needed to address complexity. Future challenges include how to methodologically, technically, and creatively bring mixed methods to finding solutions to wicked problems in terms of researchers' roles as they advocate for social justice, engage with policy makers and those in political power, and build respectful relationships with members of marginalized communities. In the future, how can mixed methods researchers explore new territory in terms of developing strategies for enhanced citizen participation in science, as well as appropriate and respectful engagement with indigenous peoples, people with disabilities, people who live in poverty, deaf people, racial and ethnic minorities, and others who experience discrimination and oppression in their daily lives (CRAM, MERTENS 2015)? What kinds of mixed methods designs will support the conduct of research that increases the potential for transformative change? What safeguards need to be in place to ensure that change is positive and constructive and not introducing additional harm? (MERTENS et al. 2016, 225).

These questions are highly important for the United States, Europe, and other countries around the globe. The US government's Commission on Evidence Based Policy (2017) report focuses only on the use extant quantitative database sharing. It is a big step forward for the U.S. government to make these recommendations. In their report, they make a recommendation to have a Chief Evaluation Officer in each department who can coordinate evaluation and policy research to enhance their ability to use evidence-based results in the formulation of policies. Hopefully, this level of visibility of evaluation in the federal government will increase the development of evidence and use of that evidence for policy purposes. This report includes many recommendations, but only the future will tell if these recommendations are acted upon.

The European Union has also expressed interest in seeing evidence of the effects of research that they have funded over the last few decades. The European Union funded a massive evaluation of the impact of social science research called IMPACT-EV Evaluating the Impact and Outcomes of European SSH research (REALE et al. 2017). The status of this initiative reveals that demand is increasing for opportunities for researchers and policymakers to engage with each other. The goal is to increase political and social impact of research and evaluation. Political impact «refers to the transfer of research findings to the political sphere to inform decision making or policy design, and social impact refers to the extent to which an action from a policy or a civil society-led action has actually contributed to improve identified social challenges» (REALE et al. 2017, 8). Seemingly, both the United States and Europe are in need of developing strategies to improve the way policies are evaluated so that they are based on evidence and lead to the desired goals.

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