



## A measure of community members' perceptions of the impacts of research partnerships in health and social services

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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received 8 June 2008

Received in revised form 21 January 2009

Accepted 8 February 2009

#### Keywords:

Research Alliance Partnership Impact

### ABSTRACT

Currently, there are no psychometrically sound outcome measures by which to assess the impacts of research partnerships. This article describes the development of a 33-item, survey questionnaire measuring community members' perceptions of the impact of research partnerships addressing health or social issues. The Community Impacts of Research Oriented Partnerships (CIROP) was developed using information from the literatures on health promotion, community development, research utilization, and community-based participatory research, and from focus groups involving 29 key informants. Data from 174 community members were used to determine the factor structure, internal consistency, and test–retest reliability of the four CIROP scales, and to provide evidence of construct validity. The CIROP informs research partnerships about the extent of their impact in the areas of Personal Knowledge Development, Personal Research Skill Development, Organizational/Group Access To and Use of Information, and Community and Organizational Development, allowing them to demonstrate accountability to funding bodies. As well, the CIROP can be used as a research tool to assess the effectiveness of knowledge sharing approaches, determine the most influential activities of research partnerships, and determine structural characteristics of partnerships associated with various types of impact. The CIROP provides a better understanding of community members' perspectives and expectations of research partnerships, with important implications for knowledge transfer and uptake.

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Research partnerships between universities and community organizations are proliferating. There are increasing pressures on researchers in these partnerships to demonstrate the impact of their work (Kuruville, Mays, & Walt, 2007; Lavis, Ross, McLeod, & Gildiner, 2003). Research funding bodies and the general public want assurance that investments made in community–university research partnerships have societal benefits (Hanney, Grant, Wooding, & Buxton, 2004; Lavis et al., 2003) and it is important for research partnerships to show that they are achieving their goals (Ribnick & Carrano, 1995; Roussos & Fawcett, 2000; Tash & Sacks, 2004).

Community–university research partnerships in the health and social service fields are collaborative endeavors involving university- and community-based researchers, university students and faculty members, health and social service providers and managers, and service recipients. These partnerships are assumed

to produce knowledge that informs community members, leading to more efficient service delivery, more effective clinical programs, and enhanced community development. The real-world impacts of research partnerships are, however, largely unexplored, and there often are unrealistic expectations about the magnitude of impact that research can have. Although there is anecdotal evidence of the benefits of research alliances, there is little concrete evidence, due to the lack of reliable and valid tools by which to measure impact.

The aim of the present study was, therefore, to develop a conceptually based survey measure to capture quantifiable information about the full range of benefits of research partnerships in the eyes of their target audiences—community members. By “community members,” we mean the group of individuals who are the intended beneficiaries of the research partnership's activities, including groups of individuals with shared interests and values (e.g., parents and teachers of children with physical disabilities) and groups of people living in the same geographical area (Green et al., 1995; McColl, 1998).

Most often, research impact has been examined using traditional measures of productivity such as counts of publications and

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citations (Hunt, Curzio, Hager, & Kinn, 1999; Johnston, 1995) or by taking the perspective of the internal research team (Nanna, Hinderer, Rosenthal, & Gans, 1997; Zuckerman, Kaluzny, & Ricketts, 1995). However, when research is aimed at making a real-world difference, it is important to assess outcomes relevant to the users or target audiences (Lyall, Bruce, Firn, Firn, & Tait, 2004).

In the following sections, we discuss (a) the nature of research oriented community–university partnerships, (b) the need for measures of impact, and (c) various approaches to the assessment of impact. We then describe the development of the Community Impacts of Research-Oriented Partnerships (CIROP) measure, including the context for its development; its intended purpose, conceptual basis, and design (including major methodological decisions that were made); and the specific study objectives.

### 1. The nature of community–university research partnerships

Community–university research partnerships provide an infrastructure from which knowledge is generated, findings are shared, and research skills are developed. These partnerships consist of groups of people who have come together to address a particular topic in a concerted way. In the field of science/technology, these research entities are referred to as knowledge value alliances. These alliances involve knowledge producers and users pursuing a unifying knowledge goal but with diverse ends in mind, including curiosity, skill development, and application (Rogers & Bozeman, 2001).

Community–university research partnerships in the health and social service fields vary with respect to the number of universities and community organizations involved, the formality of their organizational structure, and their ways of operating (King, Servais, et al., 2008). Despite this variation, community–university research partnerships have three common functions: (a) knowledge generation, (b) knowledge sharing to improve the functioning of community organizations and the well-being of communities, and (c) research education/training to improve the research skills both of university students and community service providers (Currie et al., 2005). Researchers in diverse fields, including health and science/technology, refer to knowledge generation, knowledge sharing, and research education/training as the core missions, functions, or processes of research centers or partnerships (Bozeman & Boardman, 2004; Israel, Schulz, Parker, & Becker, 1998; King, Currie, Smith, Servais, & McDougall, 2008; Youtie, Libaers, & Bozeman, 2006).

### 2. The need for measures of the impact of research partnerships

There is a need for tools (i.e., methods/approaches, frameworks, standardized measures) by which to assess the outcomes of research partnerships (Arcury, Quandt, & McCauley, 2000; Shavelson & Towne, 2002) and to understand and explain the relevance and impact of applied research (Kuruville, Mays, Pleasant, & Walt, 2006). In particular, there is a need for sensitive, accurate, and acceptable measures of the community impacts of research alliances (Illback, Kalafat, & Sanders, 1997; Paine-Andrews et al., 1997). Identifying end-users of research and capturing their views on research utility is a challenging task. It is important, however, to begin to develop tools by which to assess the societal use and impact of research (Landry, Amara, & Lamari, 2001; Lyall et al., 2004).

A search of the literatures on health promotion, community development, research utilization, and community-based partici-

patory research uncovered no standardized, generic measures of the impacts of research partnerships in the fields of health, social services, or science/technology. As yet, there are no formal assessment measures that adequately differentiate types of impact and provide numerical scores on which to base action, quantify progress, and compare performance (Halliday, Asthana, & Richardson, 2004).

The aim of the present study, therefore, was to develop a psychometrically sound measure of the impacts of community–university research partnerships addressing social or health services issues, as seen by community members who are affected by or otherwise interested in the partnership and its influence (Zuckerman et al., 1995). The measure will provide needed, quantified information about the “payback” of research partnerships (Buxton & Hanney, 1996). Payback refers to a multi-dimensional categorization of research benefits, including the knowledge that is produced, research capacity building and absorption, impact on policy, health benefits, and broader economic benefits (Hanney et al., 2004; Hanney, Packwood, & Buxton, 2000).

### 3. Approaches to the assessment of the impact of research partnerships

A range of individualized to more structured approaches can be taken to assess the impacts or benefits of partnerships. Each approach has strengths and limitations with respect to conceptual assumptions about the nature of impact, respondent biases, and ability to facilitate comparative analysis. Ideally, a number of methods are used in conjunction to reduce biases in the identification of research impacts. Anecdotal accounts and traditional indicators of productivity have limitations with respect to comparisons over time and across partnerships (Kuruville et al., 2006). Generally, a specialized impact assessment is considered to be superior, but these studies are costly, difficult to implement, and hard to replicate (Kuruville et al., 2006). As a consequence, increasing attention has been paid to providing frameworks and tools that provide a jumping off point for researchers.

Several evaluation frameworks have been proposed that involve interviews with stakeholders, users, and researchers themselves (e.g., Spaapen & Wamelink, 1999). Recently, Kuruville et al. (2006) have described a methodological approach to identifying and describing research impact in four areas, including research-related, policy, service, and societal impacts. This framework provides researchers with prompts and descriptive categories that enable them to identify specific impacts.

Lavis et al. (2003) have provided a useful inventory of approaches by which to examine the decision-making impact of applied health research. Their inventory includes a list of indicators (e.g., number of interactions with decision-makers, decision-makers' self-reported use of research) and outlines possible data sources, such as interviews with decision makers, website records, document reviews, and surveys. The inventory focuses on the influence of research partnerships on decision making, rather than on knowledge, skills, organizational research capacity, or community well-being.

The Australian Technology Network (Furlong, 2005) has developed a 5-point rating scale to assess the impact of technology-related research, ranging from outstanding impact (i.e., use of research in community or policy development) to low impact or little evidence of use. However, this scale does not capture perceptions of different types of impact, nor does it adopt the perspective of community members. In summary, the literature outlines various methodological approaches to identify and describe impact, but there are no standardized measures

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