

- **No.61**
- **When one plus one makes more than two: impacts from partnership research**

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- **Abstract:**

- Collaborative approaches to conducting research are often cited as a way of increasing impact {Martin 2010}. But how much is known about the processes through which collaboration increases research impact? What is it about partnership working that leads to impact? This paper draws on a case study of a long-term research partnership between an academic research centre focusing on families and relationships, and a third-sector organisation running a helpline for children and young people. The partnership produced two main research studies. The impacts from the research were traced using both forward-tracking (from research to impact) and backward-tracking (from policy to research) approaches. Methods included documentary analysis, interviews and surveys. Specific uses and impacts of the research from the partnership were identified and processes leading to impact mapped onto pathways. Different timescales between research publication and subsequent impact were included in the analysis. The collaborative nature of the research facilitated impact in many ways. The issues researched had a strong resonance with policy and practice issues due to the non-academic's deep understanding of policy and practice. Joint working on analysing data ensured continued relevance of emerging results. A joint strategy of user engagement led to a high level of immediate uptake of the research findings by a wider group of policy-makers and practitioners. Many of these subsequently used the research to influence policy or practice as the combination of the academic and third sector agency gave the research high credibility. The non-academic partners' activity in networks drew the research into relevant sectors. The third sector agency continued to use the research to influence policy and practice in the five years following publication. The role of collaboration can be seen to increase research impact in a number of ways. Taking a complex systems approach brings attention to the role of networks of researchers and research users discussing and developing ideas in which research might find a place. The ways in which research might have an impact therefore emerges through interaction and cannot be anticipated at the start. By working closely with research users the timeliness and relevance of research can be increased, and it is more likely to be taken up through networks where partners are active and become champions of the research findings.