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Social work research with industry: A systematic literature review of engagement and impact

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Abstract

Current research agendas in developed countries focus on academics engaging collaboratively with communities and industry partners to achieve research outcomes that demonstrate reach and significance. Social work academics are in a prime position to undertake collaborative research that has specific project benefits and wider social impacts. This article reports on a systematic literature review of articles in social work journals that reported on academic industry partnerships. The review aimed to analyse publications documenting the engagement of social work academic researchers with industry partners, to examine the nature of the research undertaken through this engagement and to ascertain the reported impact. Findings highlight that collaborative research processes could be described in greater detail, further explicit detail on collaboration and impact is needed, and while project level impacts are described in reviewed publications, most are not presenting broader societal impacts.

Implication Statement

- Social Work academics need to engage with industry partners throughout all stages of the research in collaborative ways
- Collaborative research processes between research partners need to be reported explicitly in the dissemination of the research
- Embracing collaborative research processes and explicit reporting of this research can demonstrate social work's evaluative and implementation research and its broader impacts.

Key words

Research; engagement; impact; industry collaborations; partnerships

Introduction

There is mounting pressure from government, universities and industry for academics to engage with industry partners in partnership research that demonstrates impact and outcomes for end-users (Fouché, 2015 citing Uggerhoj, 2011). For example, the Australian Research Council [ARC] (2017) actively measures the impact and engagement of academic research. Similarly, in the United Kingdom (UK), the Research Excellence Framework [REF] (2012) assesses the quality of academic research and evaluates its impact on society and the economy. Research impact, as defined by the ARC (2017), is ‘...the demonstrable contribution that research makes to the economy, society, culture, national security, public policy or services, health, the environment, or quality of life’. Impact measures for research excellence in the UK require evidence of the reach (or 'the extent and breadth of the beneficiaries of the impact') and the significance (or the degree of the influence, value or effect) of all research outcomes (REF, 2012, p. 54).

The focus on researcher engagement with industry partners to achieve these broad and significant outcomes fits well with social work, a profession that seeks to engage with individuals and communities to achieve lasting social benefit (AASW, 2013; Hughes 2016). However, to date there is limited literature that explores the engagement of social work researchers with practitioners or the impact of social work research undertaken by academic and practitioner partners. This paper reports on a systematic literature review undertaken to explore these issues as they are reported in social work journals.

Social work research partnerships

Social work research is defined here as research that is undertaken by academics affiliated with the social work discipline (Orme and Shemmings, 2010). Research is a key element of social work practice and the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) (2013) requires that research and evaluation permeate all practice of social workers. Research

in its various forms is essential for practice both in academia and other practice fields (Orme and Shemmings, 2010). With these professional priorities, social work academics should be well trained in developing effective research partnerships that are congruent with social work practice and that build on existing knowledge and practice skills (Fouché, 2015).

Yet, while social work practitioners, researchers and policy makers all work towards addressing the needs of the most vulnerable in society, this work is often undertaken independent from each other, thus diminishing the potential synergy between research and practice (Palinkas et al., 2017). The result is that research outcomes are not used widely in practice, reportedly due to a lack of access to research findings, inadequate support for research translation and false practice assumptions informing research aims (McLaughlin, 2012).

Research-practice partnerships can bridge the gap between academia and practice to produce outcomes that are valid, reliable and relevant to social work practitioners and policy makers, however this does not always happen effectively (McLaughlin, 2012; Palinkas et al., 2017). Often engagement in partnership research is experienced as problematic and time-consuming, especially if workload pressures make practitioner commitment to the research difficult or if the research findings are surprising or unwelcomed by the organisation (Sinai and Léveillé, 2010; Dominelli, 2005).

For practitioners to effectively participate in research, an environment that encourages a learning culture, promotes research literacy and provides opportunities, support, resources and time for research, is needed (Fouché, 2015). Additionally, collaborative research partnerships require particular acknowledgement of the needs and priorities of the non-academic partner to ensure the results are useful for all concerned (Saini and Léveillé, 2010). Fouché (2015) suggests the development of authentic relationships with practitioners where

they are considered full research partners in all aspects of the research thus jointly creating, appraising, validating and disseminating new knowledge.

Despite the challenges reported above, the research engagement and impact agenda presents many opportunities to the social work profession, however there is limited guidance on how to best take advantage of these opportunities. In a recent examination of partnership research across a broad spectrum of disciplines, Sinai and Léveillé (2010) highlighted that most of the reviewed research was reported descriptively rather than analytically and pointed to many issues with research design that impacted the cogency and rigour of the evaluations. Sinai and Léveillé (2010) recommended improvements in research design to evaluate the functions and outcomes of research-community partnerships. With this analysis in mind the aim of this systematic literature is to provide a synthesis of the evidence on how social work academics engage in research in conjunction with industry partners and how the impact of this research is identified and reported.

Methodology

Reviewing literature systematically means ‘to identify, evaluate and summarise the findings of all relevant individual studies, thereby making the available evidence more accessible to decision-makers’ (Kennan, Brady & Forkan, 2018, p.3). To begin this process a research protocol was developed collaboratively between the research team, using the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines for systematic literature reviews (Moher et al., 2009). The systematic literature review was registered with the International Prospective Register of Systematic Reviews (PROSPERO) [CRD42017077559] in line with the PRISMA-P guidelines (Shamseer et al., 2015).

Objectives

The aim of the systematic literature review was to gain an understanding of the nature of social work academic research partnerships with industry and to evaluate how the impact of this research was reported.

This inquiry was further detailed with the following sub-questions:

- *How did social work academics partner with industry?*
- *What were the benefits and challenges of social work researchers and industry engagement?*
- *What impact of the research industry partnership was reported and how was this impact identified?*

Search Strategy

A search strategy including key terms was identified. Social work research can be multi-disciplinary and findings may be published in a range of journals. As this review sought to highlight the engagement of social work academic researchers with industry partners, only articles published in social work specific journals were considered. This search parameter was applied to minimise the identification of irrelevant results. The Scimago and Scopus journal ranking lists were consulted to identify relevant ranked social work journals. After excluding journals without social work in the title (n= 20), 40 journals were identified. After a search of the university subscription list a further 17 unranked ejournals with social work in the title were added to the list. From this total of 57 journals, one was not accessible to the authors, two were not current for the search period, two did not publish in English language and one published abstracts only. This process resulted in a final list of 51 journals, 38 ranked and 13 unranked journals. The titles and abstracts of articles in each journal were searched, through the journal's search functions using a combination of search terms, to select relevant articles in the date range.

Searching the date range 1st January 2012 until 31st March 2017 resulted in 146 relevant articles; 90 % (n=132) of the articles identified were published in ranked journals, and 10% (n=14) were published in unranked journals.

Inclusion/ Exclusion Criteria.

Peer reviewed studies that described social work academics' research engagement with industry partners and the impact of this research were included. Eligible social work research was defined as research undertaken by academics affiliated with a university social work department, and was undertaken with non-academic industry or community partners. Publications that had no social work academic involved, did not describe a research partnership, claimed engagement and partnerships but did not detail aspects of engagement or impact of the research were excluded.

Review Process

Data Screening. A screening tool was developed based on ARC definitions of research, engagement and impact. To ensure interrater reliability, 10 % (n=15) of the articles were randomly selected, independently reviewed by an individual author and then jointly discussed by all authors prior to the screening process (Petticrew and Roberts, 2006). The level of interrater agreement in this initial process was 87.5%. Subsequent discussions revealed minor discrepancies and adjustments to the screening requirements were made. Three authors were each involved in screening a third each of the 146 articles, with a fourth author cross-checking 5 % (n=8) of the articles.

Figure 1 is the PRISMA flowchart that depicts the process used to record the literature search and results (Moher et al., 2009).

Figure 1 Study Selection log

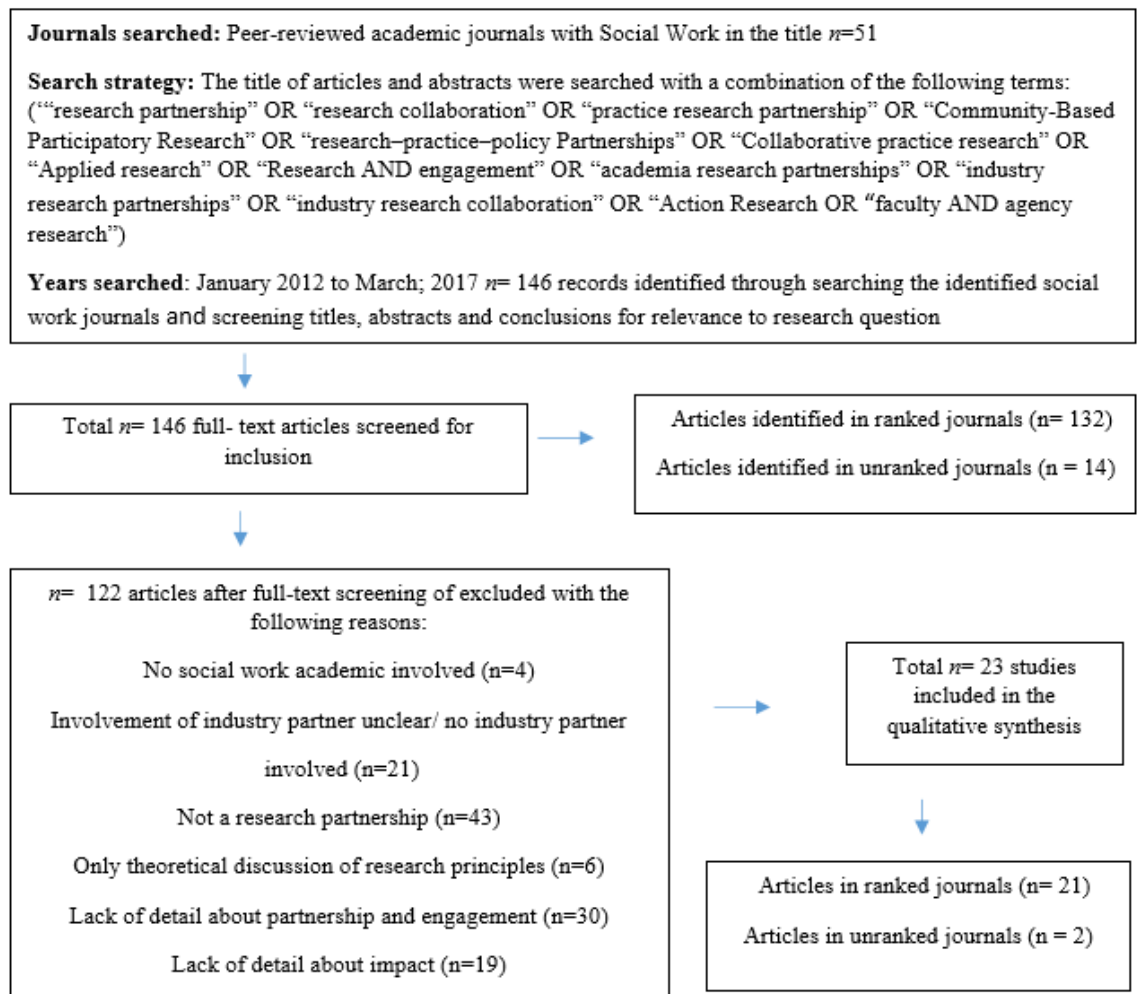


Figure 1 shows that 122 articles were excluded after full text screening. In 3% (n=4) of the articles no social work academic was involved; 35% (n=43) did not describe a research partnership; 5% (n=6) only detailed a theoretical discussion of research principles; 15% (n=19) did not discuss any impact of the research; in 17% (n=21) there was no industry partner or it was unclear, and 25% (n=30) lacked detail about the partnership. The application of the inclusion/ exclusion criteria resulted in 19% (n=23) of the studies being included in the analysis. Of these 23 studies, 91% (n=21) were published in ranked journals and 9% (n= 2) were published in unranked journals.

Data extraction. A modified PRISMA framework (Moher et al., 2009) facilitated the extraction of the following data: characteristics of the research partners; evidence of the role and position of partners in the research; descriptions of the engagement and research processes; the research approach and shared research involvement; the enablers and challenges of the engagement process; and the reported significance and reach of impact. Two reviewers tested the data extraction tool by separately reviewing 22 % of the articles (n=5) and subsequently adjusted the tool. A third reviewer cross-checked the data extraction in 100% of the articles (n=23) to ensure interrater reliability (Higgins and Green, 2011).

Application of Quality Assessment tool. Studies that reported evaluations (n=6) were assessed for research rigour and quality using the Critical Appraisal Programme [CASP] (2013) checklist for qualitative studies.

Results

The systematic literature review revealed evidence about the formation and nature of partnerships, the aims and types of research projects, the processes, challenges and enablers of engagement and the impact of the research project.

Table 1 Study characteristics and reported outcomes

Author, academic affiliation. Country of origin	Industry Partners	Type of Research	Challenges and Enablers of Engagement	Impact – reach and significance	
				Project Level Impact	Broader level impact
(Bryan et al., 2014) <i>University of South Alabama, USA</i>	Bay Area Women’s Coalition. University South Alabama USA Center for Healthy Communities.	Community- based participatory research.	Engagement processes time-consuming. Survey jargon a barrier. Focus groups useful to identify outcome of partnership and project. Cultural sensitivities, trust and respect important considerations.	Emerging relationships with community. Lessons learned for future collaborations. Project solidified commitment to health in the community. Community members gained skills research skills	Evidence for funding proposal and for a health clinic in the area. Gained private benefactor. Project solidified commitment to health in the community.
(Fallon et al., 2015) <i>University of Toronto, Canada</i>	Children’s Aid Society of Algoma. Ontario Association of	Knowledge mobilization initiative.	Practice demands barrier to involvement; remote worker involvement difficult. Earlier pilot study and dedicated funding enablers of the partnership.	Positive feedback from practitioners; produced fact sheets; published on the Canadian Child Welfare Research Portal; Agencies more supportive of data collection efforts.	

<i>McGill University, Canada</i>	Children's Aid Societies. Child welfare practitioners				
(Fleming et al., 2014) <i>De Montfort University, UK Brunel University, UK;</i>	Eight disability services. Shaping our Lives; Values into Action; St John's Hospice; Cairn Community Partnerships; SCIE.	Collaborative service user led research.	Achieving equality between partners difficult. Regular face to face meetings essential. Developing collaborative processes provide strong foundation. Informal and formal agreements and minutes useful. Importance of joint vision, and utilisation of everyone's skills and contributions.	Diverse participants found common ground. Service users found the research process to be empowering and transformative. Development of capacity building workshop. Range of outputs relevant to all stakeholders.	
(Gowen, et al. 2012) <i>Portland State University, USA</i>	National Indian Child Welfare Association Research and Training Centre on Pathways to Positive Futures.	Community-based participatory research.	Not discussed	Culturally specific evaluation tool developed. Tool used to develop case-planning protocols, to demonstrate evaluation standards and effectiveness for funding.	
(Gray and Price, 2014) <i>Virginia Commonwealth University, USA</i>	NGO Child Mental Health home visiting service.	Community based participatory research.	Partnership activities, linkages to foster inclusive philosophy, training and support useful.	Prior model reviewed and updated, new resources and new modules developed. New approaches introduced. One service is routinely implementing and evaluating the model.	
(Hansen, et al., 2015) <i>University of Texas, USA</i>	Hospice Austin Texas.	Systematic evaluation and re-development of tools and scales.		Tool implemented. Tool found to be effective and efficient. Improved documentation claimed.	
(Home, et al, 2015) <i>University of Ottawa, Canada University of Windsor, Canada</i>	Adoption Council of Canada Choices Adoption and Counselling Services	Evaluation of research dissemination strategy.	Not discussed	Increased dissemination of research findings.	
(Humphreys, et al., 2014) <i>University of Melbourne, Australia</i>	6 NGOs.	Action research.	Shared commitment to change useful.	Individual record keepers reconsidered their role; improved archiving practice. Six organisations applied for and received further grants. Self-Assessment Tool available.	

(Hunter and Mileski, 2013) <i>University of Utah, USA</i>	Neighborhood Partners Salt Lake City.	Participatory action research.	University institutional support useful.	Curriculum for community based organisations developed Changes to practice. University/ community engagement enhanced.	New project in organisations and City Council developed Women's committee introduced into the structure of Office for refugee services Academic program in College introduced.
(Iachini, et al. 2016) <i>University of Carolina, USA</i>	University South Carolina. 9 substance abuse agencies	Capacity building intervention.	Unsuccessful joint applications may exacerbate team tensions.	Skill development; peer networking opportunities; Successful resubmitted grant applications.	
(Joubert and Hocking, 2015) University of Melbourne, Australia	Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre.	Practice-based research.	Practitioner engagement challenging Manager commitment crucial. MOU provided context and structure.	Research clinically relevant; increased research confidence, evidence-base; professional development; grants; HDR completions; publications; ongoing clinical innovation	
(Lery, et al, 2015) <i>University of California, USA</i>	San Francisco Human Services Agency.	Research- focused engagement using a plan act reflect model.	Regular communication critical; time, integration with agency needs and clarification of expectations important.	Advanced research skill and child welfare research agenda; rich data; improving university – agency relationships. Updated model.	
(Letendre and Mogro-Wilson, 2016) <i>University of Connecticut, USA</i>	Archdiocese Drug Abuse Prevention Program.	Research to evaluate and transform existing model.	Process of collaborative research lengthy. Understanding of expertise, goals, beliefs and attitudes of partner organisation important.	Updated manual. Evaluation measures developed and evaluated; used to apply for funding.	
(Littlechild, et al., 2015) <i>University of Birmingham, UK</i>	Four care transition services for older people.	Evaluation of participatory action research.	Being co-researcher beneficial but has risks.	Development of research capacity.	
(Marsiglia, et al., 2017) <i>Arizona State University, USA</i>	Unnamed CBO.	Effectiveness trial of program.	Significant time commitment, information, resource, and power sharing, joint planning, acknowledgment of expertise and flexibility important. Usefulness of partner fit. Role description, buy in, and consideration of service to community versus advancing science priorities important.	Knowledge of program implementation, replication and dissemination.	
(Patterson, et al., , 2014) <i>University of Tennessee, USA</i> <i>University of Texas, USA</i>	Chattanooga Regional Homeless Coalition.	Data analysis to improve client outcomes.	Poor communication; expanded expectations; conflict between agency culture and project protocols identified challenges. Compliance to use data system difficult. Longstanding relationships and ongoing	Funding and expansion of project; student placements; PhD project; other research; informed social work education and advocacy; joint publications.	

			support from Social Work Department valuable.	
(Pham, 2016) <i>California University of Pennsylvania, USA</i>	Madrid Regional Office on Immigration Integration, Civic Centres, Moroccan community.	Community-based participatory research.	Cultural broker assisted; experienced facilitators critical.	Knowledge; subsequent conference; offshoot projects; mutual education and support.
(Powers, et al. 2014) <i>Boise State University, USA</i> <i>University of Illinois, USA</i> <i>University of North Carolina, USA</i>	Schools, mental health services, parents.	Evaluation community engagement pilot study.	MOU time-intensive but important. Familiarity with community useful; transparency of budget and monthly meetings helped partners have equal voice. Parent liaison and communication crucial. Flexible university funding valuable.	Partnership with local university; reach of partner extended; support for social workers in schools.
(Preyde et al., 2015) <i>University Guelph, Canada</i>	Vanier Children's Services. Residential/Day Treatment Mental Health Services. Social Work Services, Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board. Emergency Mental Health Services, Homewood Health Centre. Child and Adolescent Outpatient Program, Grand River Hospital.	Integrated Knowledge translation to change practice and policy.	Institutional support valuable. Collaborative efforts increase chances results are applied.	Practice and perceptions changed.
(Ringstad, et al., 2012) <i>California State University, USA</i>	City government, homeless people group, industry and service provider groups	Community based participatory research.	Collaborative approach results in greater university-community relationships	12 Master's theses completed. Ongoing community action group. Engagement between university and community.
(Stanley et al., 2015) <i>McMaster University, Canada</i> <i>Memorial University, Canada</i>	Ottawa Hospital Research Institute The PROUD Committee. The Drug Users Advocacy League.	Analysis of Participatory Action Research.	Power imbalances between academics and partners challenging. Importance of authentic research projects, active engagement and establishment of trust.	Insights of impact on research team, future orientation and increased commitment to community.
(Wahab et al., 2014) <i>Portland State</i>	Interconnections Community Partner at Large	Community based participatory research.	Including practice partners and academics results in collective experience.	New intervention.

University, USA	Multnomah County Department of Mental Health and Addictions Department of Medicine, Oregon Health & Science University.			
(Whiteside, et al., 2016) La Trobe University, Australia	Northern Health. Faculty of Health, Deakin University.	Participatory research designed to enhance evidence.	Not discussed	Increased knowledge of the use and usefulness of EBP. EBP framework developed.

Partners and partnerships

All academic authors were affiliated with universities in English speaking developed countries. Sixty percent (n=14) of the studies were conducted by academics affiliated with universities in the USA, 17% (n=4) with universities in Canada, 13% (n=3) with universities in Australia and 8% (n=2) with universities in the United Kingdom (8%, n=2). In 73% (n=17) of the studies authorship was shared by academic researcher/s and their industry partner/s; in 82 % (n=14) of those joint articles the academic was listed as lead author.

Forty-three percent (n=10) of the industry partners were community-based welfare organisations, 30% (n=7) were representative consumer groups, and 26% (n=6) were government departments or city councils. Thirty-nine percent (n=9) of the partner organisations represented health-related organisations or groups, 25% (n=6) were in the child welfare sector, 8% (n=3) supported people with substance use issues, and 8 % (n=2) supported refugees and migrants. Eight percent (n=2) were homelessness organisations.

Table 2 details the evidence gathered to determine engagement, including the language used to describe engagement, shared authorship, length of partnership, partnership initiation, explicit roles for partners and the collaborative aspects of the project.

Table 2 Process of engagement and collaboration: Evidence of engagement

Author	Language describing engagement	Shared authorship	Length of partnership	Initiator/ initiation process	Role descriptions	Collaborative aspects	Formal Agreement
(Bryan et al., 2014)	Partnership/ mutual benefit	Yes	3 years	University	Partnership/ mutual benefit	Yes	3 years
(Fallon et al., 2015)	Collaboration Partnership	Yes	2 years	Partner	Not discussed	Training and dissemination	Unknown
Fleming et al., 2014)	Consortia Collaboration Partnership	Yes	4 years	University Unknown process	Research initiated, implemented and managed jointly.	Throughout.	Legal contracts and value based agreements
(Gowen, et al., 2012)	Collaboration Equal Partners	Yes	5 years	Unknown	Not discussed	Not clear	Unknown
(Gray and Price, 2014)	Partnership	No	5 years	Academic	Academics train home visitors Evaluate outcomes	Not clear	Unknown
(Hansen, et al., 2015)	Project team The Team	Yes	2 years	Partner	Not discussed	Not clear	Unknown
(Home, et al., 2015)	Team Partnership	Yes	Unknown	Academic Academic contacted others	Not discussed	Grant proposal Running workshops Creating documents	Unknown
(Humphreys, et al., 2014)	Team Research team	Yes	3 years	Academic	Jointly developed and applied.	Development of tool Inclusive of participants	Unknown
(Hunter & Mileski, 2013)	University-community partnership	No	3 years	Academic	University as trainers	Not Clear	Unknown
(Iachini, et al. 2016)	Partnership We	No	4 months	Academic Alternative to funding request.	Not discussed	Meetings training	Yes
(Joubert & Hocking, 2015)	Partnership mutual engagement	Yes	2 years	Unknown Seconded Resident Fellow to department	University as research Mentors	Not clear	MOU
(Lery, et al., 2015)	Partnership	Yes	5 years	Unknown	Agency provides technical assistance. University as trainers.	Not clear	Unknown
(Letendre and Mogro-Wilson, 2016)	Collaboration We	Yes	Unknown	Agency	Not discussed	Development of methods	Unknown
(Littlechild, et al. 2015)	Co- research approach	No	Unknown	Academic team	Co- researcher.	Methods Analysis report	Unknown

(Marsigli a, et al., 2017)	Partnership Equally owned	Yes	Unknown	Academic team chose partner	Research team trains facilitators	RCT plan	Some aspects
(Patterson, et al. 2014)	Partnership Reciprocal relationship	Yes	10 years	Unknown	Academic as trainers	No clear	Yes
(Pham, 2016)	Collaboration	No	11 months	Partner	Academic as consultant.	Collaborative Training delivery	Yes
(Powers, et al., 2014)	Shared Partnership	Yes	1 year	Academic University funding impetus	Not discussed	Goal development Execution of pilot	MOU
(Preyde et al., 2015)	Partnership	Yes	Unknown	Academic	Not discussed	Development of research question/s Research methods	Unknown
(Ringstad , et al., 2012)	Partnership, community engagement	No	1 year	Partner	University as experts to review, make recommendations. Then joint leadership.	Group facilitation	Unknown
(Stanley et al., 2015)	Collaboration We	Yes	8 weeks	Partner	Not discussed	Not clear	Unknown
(Wahab et al., 2014)	Academic community partnership	Yes	>5yrs	Unknown	Not discussed	Design and implementation of observations	Unknown
(Whiteside, et al, 2016)	Nil	Yes	< 12 months	Partner	University commissioned to investigate.	Not clear	Unknown

In describing their engagement, authors chose the language of ‘partnership’ (65%, n=15), collaboration (26%, n=6), ‘team’ (4%, n=1) and ‘consortia’ (4%, n=1). In total, 78% (n=18) reported on length of the partnership and of those, 66% (n=12) described partnerships of 2 years or more. In 47% (n=11) of the projects the academic researcher initiated the research project and 30%(n=7) were initiated by the partner organisation. Twenty one percent (n=5) of the papers did not describe the initiation of the partnership.

While the language of partnership and collaboration suggests shared processes and negotiated roles, 43% (n=10) of the papers did not include a role description for each partner.

Of the 13 papers that did describe the specific roles of partners, 26% (n=6) identified the academic partners as trainers or mentors in a project conducted in the partner organisation.

Aims of the research

A number of the projects had multiple aims. Thirty nine percent (n=9) of projects aimed to improve services, interventions or outcomes, while 34% (n=8) aimed to develop a program, tool or intervention and 30% (n=7) included aims of evaluation, and increased use of evidence or data by the program.

Type of research

In total, 52% (n=12) of the projects adopted a participatory community based or action research model and 30% (n=7) of the studies focused on program or research evaluation. Twenty-one percent (n=5) of the studies described the research broadly, such as ‘knowledge mobilization initiative’ (Fallon, et al, 2015) or ‘practice- based research’ (Joubert and Hocking, 2015).

Process of engagement

Of the examined studies, 61% (n=14) named collaborative research processes as integral to the engagement between the social work academic researchers and the industry partners. However, only one study in the 23 projects described collaboration at all stages of the research process (Fleming et al., 2014). Of the remaining 22 studies, many indicated some collaborative processes.

Training community members in research methods to facilitate their participation in the research process was reported as a collaborative activity in five (21%) and shared development of research methodology in 21% (n=5) of the studies. Other collaborative aspects of the reported studies included funding applications and goal development. However, 39% (n=9) of the articles failed to describe any collaborative processes.

Challenges and enablers of engagement

All studies (n=23) included some discussion of challenges and enablers of the engagement process. Commitment, active participation and support from all parties was identified in 34% (n=8) of the studies while 26% (n=6) explicitly highlighted mutual respect and understanding of partners roles and obligations as vital to the engagement process. Strategies to achieve respectful engagement included regular communication and establishing transparent partner agreements.

Limited time was the key challenge described in 34% (n=8) of the articles. Many authors discussed the importance of regular, but time-consuming, communication between all parties as essential to embed research engagement in well-established partnerships. The significant power inequities that existed between university researchers and some industry partners was identified in 26% (n=6) of the articles as potentially challenging the longevity and sustainability of research partnerships

Impact reach and significance

All papers described project level impact. For example, 52% (n=12) described improvements or positive changes in the practice of the industry partner; 52% (n=12) developed new resources, tools or knowledge and 34% identified stronger relationships between universities and the community. In total, 21% (n=5) of the studies pointed to the increased capacity of the research participants and 17% (n=4) reported funding for ongoing research as results of the partnership.

Two projects outlined broader level impacts. Bryan et al. (2014) reported that research findings provided evidence for a funding proposal for a health clinic and solidified the commitment to health in the community, including support from a private benefactor. Hunter and Mileski (2013) described the development of mentoring processes between community-based organisations and the City Council, a new women's committee in the Office for Refugee services, and the introduction of a formal academic program at the college.

Quality appraisal of studies reporting on evaluations

Quality appraisal results of the studies reporting on evaluation are presented in Table

3.

Table 3: Quality appraisal of studies reporting on evaluations

Author	Type of research	Clear statement of Aims?	Qualitative methodology appropriate?	Research design appropriate to meet aims?	Recruitment strategy appropriate?	Data collected addressing research issue?	Relationship between researcher and participants?	Ethical issues considered?	Data analysis rigorous?	Clear statement of findings?	Valuable research?
(Bryan et al., 2014)	Qualitative – Process evaluation partnership	Yes	Yes	Yes	Not discussed	Yes	No	Not discussed	Not discussed	Yes	Yes
(Home, et al. 2015)	Qualitative Evaluation of community dissemination project	Yes	Yes	Yes, but not justified	Yes	Yes	Yes – Independent evaluator	Can't tell	Can't tell	Yes	Yes
(Hunter and Mileski, 2013)	Qualitative Process evaluation of collaborative leadership training program	Yes , but limited	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Can't tell	Yes	Can't tell	Yes	Yes
(Littlechild, et al. 2015)	Qualitative Evaluating effectiveness of the co-researcher model	Yes - implied	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes - independent evaluator	Yes in discussion as core issue	Yes	Yes	Yes
(Ringstad, et al. 2012)	Qualitative Evaluating process and results of engagement.	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Can't tell	Can't tell	Can't tell	No	Yes	Yes
(Stanley et al., 2015)	Qualitative Evaluation of study.	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Can't tell	Yes	Yes - very	Yes	Yes

Of the 23 studies, 26% (n=6) reported evaluations of the research partnership process.

These studies used a qualitative methodology and were assessed using the CASP (2013) tool.

Overall, the methodological quality of the studies was assessed as moderate to strong with all six studies including discussion and justification of the research aims, study design, findings, and overall value of the research. The reporting of ethical issues and data analysis strategies

were less rigorous, with only two studies (Littlechild et al., 2015; Stanley et al., 2015) explicitly including these details.

The quality of the evaluations varied depending on the purpose and style of evaluation. Three authors (Bryan et al., 2014; Littlechild et al., 2015; Stanley et al., 2015) reported on formal, purposeful evaluations, while three (Home et al., 2015; Hunter and Mileski, 2013; Ringstad et al., 2012) reported reflective, introspective evaluations of the process. When a formal evaluation was used many aspects of the evaluation process were evident. In reflective evaluations, the specifics of methodology were unclear and consequently, the quality as an evaluation of engagement was weak. However, these articles were valuable in contributing to knowledge about engagement.

Discussion

This systematic literature review examined research undertaken by social work academics in conjunction with industry partners published in social work journals and reported research engagement and impacts. No other systematic literature review that explored social work research with community partners and documented the engagement and impact of this work was identified.

All included 23 papers came from English speaking countries and this may be unsurprising given the review was limited to English language publications. Many of the publications reported on United States-based projects in health and welfare sectors. However, all the articles reported research from *developed* English speaking countries with no articles located for inclusion from English-speaking *developing* countries. This concerning result may suggest difficulties for authors from developing countries having their papers accepted in peer-reviewed social work journals.

One encouraging finding was the common use of inclusive language, with authors describing projects as industry partnerships and collaborations. This may point to more researchers and project partners engaged in shared processes. Pre-existing relationships were reported in some research partnerships. However, as noted, 21% (n=5) of the papers did not describe the initiation of the partnership, and 43 % (n=10) of the articles did not clearly describe the roles of industry partners. Equally, where partner roles were described, the descriptions depicted unidirectional processes of academic research mentoring with industry partners, rather than processes of reciprocal learning. It seems that while professional social workers are experienced in collaboratively engaging with community partners, at best social work academics might not be well practised in fully reporting on research engagements or effectively applying their practice skills to all processes within the partnership research. While the research might have been an excellent example of a successful social work partnership collaboration, that information was not accessible to readers.

To authentically embrace the engagement agenda (ARC, 2017; Ref 2012) that appears so in tune with the social work's core business, this outcome has significant implications for future research collaborations and dissemination of findings. First, partnerships must ensure the active engagement of research partners in all stages of the collaborations. Second, reciprocity and knowledge exchange need to be explicitly imbedded in all aspects of research partnership projects. Third, increased clarity in reporting of these aspects of engagements is required.

The findings from the systematic literature review reported here also have implications for how the impact of social work research is identified and understood. The finding that all authors reported project level impacts appears to be a step in the right direction. Yet, only two out of the 23 papers reported impacts that are relevant to the ARC definition of societal impact. While this may not be surprising given that it reportedly can

take between 5-17 years for research to translate into broader societal impact (Tsey et al., 2016), these findings suggest that measuring the impact of social work research is still at a developmental stage. Social work researchers can aid the process by explicitly including processes that systematically plan, monitor and report on the significance and contribution of their projects to the broader society. Quantifying and assessing the impact of social work research can strengthen social work's unique leadership. This may require the development and use of social work relevant tools for measuring and reporting impact, to capture the unique contribution of social work research and avoid the imposition of an audit culture (Tilbury et al., 2017).

It seems clear from this systematic literature review that a commitment of time and human resources enabled richer relationships, engagement, collaboration and partner satisfaction. Yet both can be a significant challenge for research partners (Bryan et al., 2014; Fouché, 2015; Tilbury, et al., 2017). Both university and industry partners might need to advocate for workload allocations that afford the time necessary to build meaningful long-term research partnerships. Additionally social work authors must fully document the processes that result in strong industry partnerships through formalised evaluation to demonstrate ways to increase research impact in future research (Fouché, 2015).

Limitations

The limitation of the search strategy must be noted. To limit the search to social work academics only social work journals were searched, but social work academics do publish their research in other than social work journals. This could mean that not all eligible studies have been considered in this systematic literature review. However, it is likely that many social work academics would publish in discipline specific journals to reach their target audiences.

A further limitation of the study relates to the analysis which is restricted to what has been reported in available publications. While this systematic literature review focused on extrapolating and analysing information about social work research partnerships and their impact, the authors of the articles reviewed did not have this narrow focus and therefore might not have reported aspects of collaboration and partnerships or the impact of their research in detail. A final limitation is that all papers included were English language publications.

Conclusion

A growing formal research agenda of engagement and impact has great potential for social work researchers. Social workers are experienced in engaging with partnership networks through collaboration and are committed to practice that contributes to lasting social change. This study has highlighted that social work academics may not be well practised in applying these skills to partnership research, including the reporting of such partnerships. For social work academics to embrace the research agendas of engagement and impact, more active engagement and documentation of all stages of the research collaboration is needed. Importantly, social work researchers may need to take a longer-term approach to planning for, monitoring and reporting research impact (Tsey, et al., 2016). Achieving broader level impacts is an area for improvement against the Australian ARC and the British REF agenda.

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