

Is our research doing its job? Over to you

How useful do you find ESRC-funded research? Has any particular piece of research inspired change in your organisation or way of working? In what ways could the ESRC make it easier for you to benefit from appropriate research findings?

As part of a wide-ranging review into the impact of research, we are keen to hear about your experiences of using our research. A discussion forum has been set up on ESRC Society Today and we invite users to contribute their experiences – both positive and negative – of using research material to this forum. In particular, we hope to gather practical examples of the transfer of research findings into policy, business or public sector settings. In other words, to gather ‘real-life’ examples of the ways in which research influences the world outside academia.

ESRC Senior Evaluation Manager, Ronni Littlewood, explains: “we are currently exploring new ways of assessing the non-academic impact of research, in order to

demonstrate how the outcomes of ESRC research are utilised by policymakers and practitioners.

“It is clear,” she continues, “that there are numerous ways in which the outcomes from social science research can contribute to and influence policy and practice by, for example, encouraging better informed public policy and decision making, improved professional practice and organisational decision making, different ways of thinking about the nature of social and economic problems, and innovative solutions and improved public understanding and more informed public discourse. But, to ensure that our research does make such impact, we need first to understand how our users interact with social science research and with researchers.

The discussion forum can be accessed on ESRC SocietyToday at www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/Forums/default.aspx?f=22

Alternatively, you can contact Ronni Littlewood at the ESRC (veronica.littlewood@esrc.ac.uk) or on 01793 413141

Putting ill-health in its place



ROSE BARTON

That deprivation and ill-health may be linked is well known. But new research into the link between Londoners’ socio-economic circumstances and their risk of hospitalisation for cardiovascular disease offers some surprising findings. “Basically after accounting for various individual level socio-economic

characteristics and using our new methodology, we found scarcely any remaining variation in the risk of being hospitalised for heart disease between different London districts,” explains researcher Professor Sylvia Richardson.

On the other hand, this study identifies a marked difference in the prevalence of limiting long-term illnesses (for example, asthma, chronic bronchitis and diabetes) between London’s deprived and non-deprived neighbourhoods. In the case of male Londoners aged 45 to 59, researchers found that non-white ethnicity, low household income and neighbourhood deprivation were associated with an increased risk of limiting long-term illness.

Researchers now aim to conduct a range of other studies of disease risk. These include a study of environmental benzene exposure and childhood leukaemia in London, and a project studying low birth weight and its relationship with air pollution and socio-economic characteristics.

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Looking forward

A selection of new ESRC-funded research

■ The impact of prostitution law

A review of prostitution laws in the UK is underway. Under current legislation, specific laws have resulted in some forms of sex work – but not others – being illegal in specific places at specific times. Researchers aim to explore how the spatial distribution of sex work in four cities (London, Edinburgh, Malmo and Utrecht) has been shaped by particular socio-legal modes of regulation.

■ Incentives and productivity

What impact do incentives have on workers’ productivity? Using data on workers’ productivity collected at a leading UK farm, researchers aim to provide unique evidence on how incentives work in practice. They will compare productivity under a relative scheme (by which each worker’s pay depends on their productivity compared to their peers’) with productivity under piece rates (by which their pay depends on their performance only).

■ Devolving power to women

The devolution of government to Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales has been accompanied by a significant increase in the proportion of women political representatives in these new legislatures. Using Wales as a case study, researchers will investigate how far this increase is associated with a change in the gendering of political processes and whether policy developments now incorporate greater awareness of women’s and gender issues.

■ How cities respond to threat

The terrorist attacks on America of September 11 2001 signalled a surge in the adoption of anti-terrorism and crime measures by urban authorities throughout the UK. Researchers will investigate the differing schemes and strategies adopted in three different urban areas including a global city which has experienced significant urban attack, a large regional conurbation which has been periodically at risk and a medium conurbation at relatively low risk.

For further information please contact the ESRC’s Communications and Information Directorate on 01793 413051.