

Trends of Research Submissions at JCPSP and their Impact on the Impact Factor: An Editor's Views

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The recent announcement of the Journal Citation Reports (JCR) by Clarivate Analytics shows that the Impact Factor (IF) of the Journal of College of Physicians and Surgeons Pakistan (JCPSP) has risen to 0.711, with a 5-year IF of 0.735. The JCR is based on 2020 data compiled from the Web of Science Core Collection™. This is a heartening news for the editorial staff and the parent institution sponsoring the journal. This reflects an increase in the number of citations of published articles in JCPSP, a reflection of quality publication.

JCPSP has always tried not to compromise on the quality of the manuscripts as well as no attempt is made to artificially inflate the IF by increasing different categories of citable articles like more emphasis on publishing meta-analyses and systematic reviews and discouraging non-citable items such as case reports, viewpoints, letter to editors etc. At the same time, self-citation is also discouraged. This is practised by a number of journals all over the world.

From an editor's perspective, there are other important observations that have contributed to increase in IF. These include improved global visibility of JCPSP having its own dedicated user-friendly website, online easy submission portal, quick processing, addressing promptly the authors' concern, attracting submissions from number of countries all over the world, diversity of research topics with novel ideas, higher levels of evidence as evidenced by increased number of randomised controlled trials (RCTs), to name the few.

Elaborating more on articles submission trend, it is observed that there has been a constant and almost exponential rise in submissions of original research and clinical practice articles from outside Pakistan; the major contributors being Chinese and Turkish researchers. The submissions from Pakistan have decreased significantly over the last 12-month period. In many published issues, there was hardly any original article from Pakistan. This is a message for regulatory authority the Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan, to probe into the reason behind such a trend as all medical universities receive huge funds for promoting research by faculty members.

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Most of the studies submitted by authors from Pakistan are on the subjects where hardly any gaps in knowledge exist. We also presume that downgrading Pakistani medical journals from W to X category may be a reason for researchers to submit their manuscripts to higher impact journals but it is a distant possibility looking at output of high quality medical research from Pakistan. We suggest that HEC of Pakistan may revert to old categorisation of national journals so as to encourage more quality submissions. Linking it to promotion of faculty members seems important; but other criteria may be incorporated at the time of selection, as only number of publications may not reflect true potential of a candidate. Pakistani academia, like the global contemporaries, has to "publish or perish". The HEC categorisation of a journal directly affects the Faculty's promotion, grants awards, reimbursement decisions at certain institutions, and consideration for National Awards.

Another observation regarding submission to JCPSP noted is studies being conducted by national researchers without Institutional Review Board permission / Ethical clearance. This is a mandatory requirement at submission. JCPSP has stopped accepting the dissertation approval letter *in lieu* of Institutional approval or exemption letters. It is also observed that many authors make submissions without reading "instructions to the authors" and fail to comply with format requirement. Number of submissions are also returned at rigorous in-house statistical checking stage following demand for the production of the statistical output sheets to safeguard against cooked and falsified data. Few authors find it difficult to make submission through online journal management system. They have to learn all these requirements. The authors from other countries are more well-versed with the technology and format requirement; thus their submissions pass through easily from editorial check points. The only difficulty they face is with language and grammar; for which, many take help of professionals in the field and submit certificate of verification of text of the manuscript. It is worth mentioning that there are few IF journals that do not charge authors with any sort of processing or publication. This may be another reason for increased submissions from abroad. However, it is under consideration that JCPSP may impose publication charges at subsidised rates as huge cost is borne-out by the parent institution on rendering such services.

Globally, it has been noticed that major medical journals published more non-RCT COVID-19 studies than other disciplines and the RCTs.¹ At JCPSP, the major categories of research

on COVID-19 were also non-RCTs, focusing on seroprevalence, factors affecting survival, telemedicine services, service profile changes, mental health issues, and the online education practices during the pandemic. Realizing the redundancy of the submissions, JCPSP soon stopped accepting such research; and in fact was at the receiving end of some very angry rebuttals from the desirous local authors.

There is no dearth of quality data or quality authors and researchers in Pakistan. They may be submitting the research at a high cost to journals with even lesser IF and even those with

no IF, despite being indexed or included in repositories. JCPSP looks forward to novel, more robust, statistically analysed data, conducted after IRB approval from our readers and contributors. These changing trends and their impact on the Journal's citations is an interesting phenomenon worth further study in Journalology.

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