

Ways to get a more balanced gender representation in addiction journals' management and workforce

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Abstract

Although the scientific community, particularly academic publishing, claims to be gender-neutral and based on meritocracy, it mirrors other parts of modern society, wherein residual gender imbalances and implicit and explicit gender biases are reproduced. In this report, we address gender imbalances (in particular, the overrepresentation of men) in the editorial workforce of academic journals as barriers to women's promotion and career progression in addiction science. We also consider potential gender-related elements and biases in the peer-review and editorial decision-making processes, which may result in women's lower publication rates, thereby creating another gender-related barrier to women's promotion, career progression and academic recognition. Establishing a more balanced gender representation in addiction publishing will require the adoption of the SAGER guidelines and the development of Gender Equality Plans for addiction

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specialty journals. Finally, although our focus concerns gender, the organisational mechanisms identified here also affect other types of heterogeneity and intersectional thinking.

Keywords

academia, addiction, diversity, disparities, gender

Academic journals are a crucial part of addiction science production and communication. They play a key role in knowledge dissemination and influence the development of new research and innovation. As gatekeepers for scientific work, they shape clinical, preventive and policy approaches to the disease burden attributable to addiction. Academic publications and citations are key indicators of scientific productivity and influence the success of researchers receiving research grants and researchers' academic promotion and advancement.

Although the scientific community, particularly academic publishing, claims to be gender-neutral and based on meritocracy, it mirrors other parts of modern society, wherein residual gender imbalances and implicit and explicit gender biases are reproduced. To that end, the gender-neutral notion of "academic excellence" is, in part, socially constructed through implicit operational criteria of academia (van den Brink & Benschop, 2011). Evaluating candidates, papers and publications that comprise our standard measurement is an inherently gendered social process (van den Brink & Benschop, 2011).

Numerous studies have focused on elucidating the sex and gender gap in the research, publishing and academic career processes. Research has uncovered biases against women in teaching evaluations (MacNell et al., 2015), letters of recommendation (Trix & Psenka, 2003) and peer reviews (Holman et al., 2018). Research consistently demonstrates disparities for women in academic promotion, journal authorship, research funding, leadership roles and compensation (Burstin & Arora, 2021). Significant pay differentials exist, and there is often a male-dominated hierarchical system (Burstin & Arora, 2021). In

many addiction science disciplines, women's possibilities to advance or get appointed to associate professor, full professor or department chair have not improved. It has been suggested that the situation has worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic (Burstin & Arora, 2021). There are still gender gaps in rates of submissions, citations and scholarly publications (Østby et al., 2013; Teele & Thelen, 2017; Upthegrove et al., 2021). Women account for a lower share of higher academic degrees and positions (Frietsch et al., 2009), and women PhD holders and graduate students of colour report fewer publications and less inclusion in the scientific-review process than their white and male counterparts (Willis et al., 2021). A Portuguese study suggests that higher education institutions, including universities and colleges, can recreate career inequalities in other occupational spheres and that informal procedures are pertinent obstacles to women's entrance into academic careers (Carvalho & Santiago, 2010). As other international studies suggest, Chinese women faculty work double time but continue to play a limited role in critical personnel decisions influencing academic promotions and advancement (Rhoads & Gu, 2012). Women Faculty experience negative institutional and departmental environments and slow promotion rates (Gardner, 2012).

Differences in submission rates underlie the gender gap in publication, and role divisions in academic teams play an important part. For example, work by female scholars is underrepresented at the submission stage, but conditional on submission; male and female scholars have similar acceptance rates (König & Ropers, 2018; Nedal & Nexon, 2018; Peterson, 2018; Samuels, 2018; Tudor &

Yashar, 2018). Gender differences appear to be largely limited to journal-article submissions versus other types of work in the discipline, such as books (Djupe et al., 2018, 2022). Quantitative/qualitative differences and risk orientation toward the review process likely play a role. Importantly, co-authorship appears to amplify rather than mitigate gender differences. Both methodological specialisation and attitudes toward publication strategies play roles. Men and women obtain differential returns on their investments in co-authorship. Although male and female respondents report identical propensities to co-author, co-authorship boosts submission and publication rates more strongly for men than women.

While the inclusion of gender-diverse study populations has improved, reporting sex and gender variables in research is still incomplete (Van Epps et al., 2022). Consequently, in 2016, the Sex and Gender Equity in Research (SAGER) guidelines outlined a comprehensive procedure for reporting sex and gender information in study design, data analysis, results and interpretations of findings (Heidari et al., 2016). The SAGER guidelines include recommendations to authors, journal editors, peer-reviewers and publishers for ensuring appropriate reporting of sex and gender considerations in the scholarly literature. Many journals have incorporated the SAGER guidelines into their editorial policies and encouraged authors to follow them. In addition, more non-academic research organisations have begun incorporating the SAGER guidelines in their publication policies. The SAGER guidelines have also provoked additional reflection on the importance of sex and gender considerations in publishing.

Despite the growing awareness of the SAGER guidelines, critical barriers remain to implementing sex-based and gender-based analyses in research and reporting systematically (Peters et al., 2021). These include the following: concerns about mandating the guidelines; resistance to implementation; lack of awareness; lack of time, capacity or resources; and technical challenges.

One of the chief barriers stems from the gender composition of journal editorial boards and the industry in general. Historically, men are overrepresented on journal editorial boards, which have experienced slow-to-stagnant growth, particularly for women of colour (Hutchinson et al., 2021; Metz et al., 2016). In addition, citation practices reproduce established power hierarchies (Blewett et al., 2019).

Consequently, a more balanced gender distribution among the International Society of Addiction Journal Editors (ISAJE) member journals' workforce can positively impact the scientific literature and add to its usefulness to various audiences. In addition, more diverse gender perspectives will include more relevant viewpoints on complex questions. There is also an intrinsic moral value in a *modus operandi* that strives towards inclusion and broad-mindedness.

In this report, we address gender imbalances (in particular, men's overrepresentation) in the editorial workforce of academic journals as barriers to women's promotion and career progression in addiction science. We also consider potential gender-related elements and biases in the peer-review and editorial decision-making processes, which may result in women's lower publication rates, thereby creating another gender-related barrier to women's promotion, career progression and academic recognition. In this position paper, we acknowledge that educational philosophy, such as Kumashiro's four approaches to anti-oppressive education, can be applied to formulating gender inequity in academia and can support the need to challenge and transform oppressive structures, systems and ideologies while promoting inclusivity and critical consciousness (Kumashiro, 2000). Although our main focus concerns gender, the organisational mechanisms identified here also affect other types of heterogeneity and intersectional thinking.

State of the art in addiction publishing

In addiction publishing, several studies have shown a clear gender bias in the editorial

hierarchy of the journal-based peer-review system. The first study evaluated gender disparities in the editorial hierarchy of 54 addiction specialty journals, half of them ISAJE members (Ahmed, 2016). Gender audits ($n = 4300$) were conducted via online searches for the given names of all listed editors-in-chief ($n = 68$), editorial board members ($n = 1823$), assistant/associate editors ($n = 414$), as well as primary ($n = 990$) and secondary ($n = 1005$) authors of original research articles. Regression analysis showed that as the position in the power hierarchy increased, the proportion of women decreased. Furthermore, correlation analyses showed that the more editors endorsed attitude statements suggesting gender bias, the less they intended to implement journal policies to remove the gender gap. This study shows that the gender disparity within the peer-review structure of scientific journals publishing addiction science is greatest at the higher levels (e.g., editor, editorial advisory board) despite clear evidence of gender balance among the primary and secondary authors.

An ISAJE-initiated recent audit on heterogeneity in addiction publishing (involving 41 journals) covered gender and geographic diversity and socio-linguist adherence of authors and editors. It showed that of all staff members, 61% were men and 39% were women (Hellman, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c). There was no correlation (0.0545) between the proportion of men and the Impact Factor. A larger share of editors-in-chief were men (80%) than women (20%). A total of 10 women and 41 men were among the 51 editors-in-chief, although some journals had more than one. As indicated by these studies, there is a need for affirmative action to correct the gender imbalance in journal management.

The gender differences in authorship and editing might affect the perspective presented on addiction science, aetiology and treatment. The risk of creating a gap in scientific knowledge is present when aspects of gender (and certainly also race, culture, geography and LGBTQ2S+) are not considered. In addition,

different experiences in treatment and addiction are likely to be overlooked. For example, small studies on motherhood and addiction or women's experiences of sexual abuse, co-dependency and trafficking are underrepresented. This is a paradox considering that most staff working in drug treatment are, in fact, women. If the gender gaps identified in this report are to be addressed, there is a need for addiction studies and related publishing enterprises to acknowledge how much our field is profoundly gendered.

What can journals do?

Inventories and monitoring: Journal editors and publishers can correct gender biases by conducting an inventory of their workforce, both volunteer and paid, to document the proportions of women and men serving on the editorial advisory board, journal management staff, as well as assistant editors and reviewers. The standard calculation of journal-based indicators by gender can help to track changes over time and draw attention to the need for greater gender balance (Mauleón et al., 2013). The proportions of women among the head office senior professionals, senior editors and assistant editors barely meet EU standards for optimal functioning (i.e., at least 30%) in many ISAJE journals. These estimates suggest that, where appropriate and feasible, gender balance should become a recruitment goal for the workforce of many addiction journals, and clear objectives should be formulated along with a timetable for implementation.

What can journals do together?

Communication of evidence and awareness raising: To provide member journals with information about the importance of considering gender and equity matters in scholarly journals, ISAJE can communicate evidence about the extent and pattern of gender imbalances in the editorial workforce and gender biases in the peer-review and editorial decision-making

processes. For example, an online seminar could be developed to train member journals' editorial team/staff on the importance of sex-/gender-sensitive reporting, which could be arranged with umbrella organisations in the publishing field. ISAJE is, for example, active in the gender policy work groups of the European Association for Science Editors (EASE).

Diversity policy committees for monitoring and implementation: An ISAJE Diversity Policy Committee could work with the ISAJE board to conduct gender audits of ISAJE member journals – such as the Hellman (2020) study – and report the results to journal editors along with suggestions for ways to reduce gender disparities in the scientific publishing process, including authorship, peer review, editorial decision-making, editorship of journals and service on Advisory Boards. To assist the development and implementation of Gender Equality Plans, the ISAJE Gender Policy Committee could provide technical support to the senior editorial management of affiliated journals with significant gender disparities (i.e., >10% identified through the gender audit/baseline assessment). The results of the gender audit for the specific journal can serve to identify gender disparities and gaps in each journal and support the development of specific actions to be included in the respective Gender Equality Plan of each journal.

ISAJE could conduct key consultations with senior editors of affiliated journals that do not have Gender Equality Plans or have not implemented the SAGER guidelines or similar gender policies to understand barriers and facilitators to mainstream gender in their journals.

In the implementation of these recommendations, the steps suggested in the GEAR tool can be used to develop Gender Equality Plans for scholarly journals, which, in addition to actions to address the gender imbalance in the editorial workforce, will also include implementation of the SAGER 2.0 guidelines to improve the reporting of gender dimensions across disciplines. The full implementation of

the SAGER 2.0 guidelines requires the inclusion of the guidelines in Instructions to Authors, integration of a checkbox in the submission system for relevant journals for the authors to confirm that they complied with the SAGER guidelines (or justified if they have not), and inclusion of a question in the guide to peer-reviewers to ensure they assess sex/gender dimensions in the submitted manuscripts.

Establishing awards for women scholars: Many science organisations have started to pay attention to the lack of representation of women among the receivers of awards in the addiction field. A good example is the Jellinek Memorial Fund's lifetime achievement award for outstanding contributions to advance knowledge on alcohol or alcoholism, which has been given to 53 men and nine women since 1968 (Jellinek Memorial Awards, 2022). However, as recently as 2019 and 2003, two men were awarded at once. To propose a change in the historical lines of the award recipients and to raise awareness, ISAJE can be an initiator of an Award for Women in Addiction Science, which aligns with our organisation's long-term ambitions to raise awareness of diversity questions in making science through all addiction science publishing-related activities, but also, with other addiction agencies, such as the Society for the Study of Addiction (The Society for the Study of Addiction, 2018).

Conclusions

In conclusion, there are persistent and pervasive gender disparities in all levels of academia: submissions of scholarly manuscripts, publication rates, citations, editorial board composition and holders of higher academic degrees and positions. The process of appraising academic excellence is inherently a gendered social construct. Establishing a more balanced gender representation in academia will require a multi-modal, active process spanning all levels of academic processes. These include increasing invitations to women to publish, conducting

peer reviews and joining editorial boards. Within addiction publishing, ISAJE has taken steps toward improving gender representation across member journals. Important components of this approach involve adopting the SAGER guidelines and utilising the GEAR tool to help develop Gender Equality Plans for scholarly journals. While addressing gender imbalances is a key step, it is only one part of a larger process that must challenge prevailing norms, biases and privileges to effect pervasive change. Moreover, achieving gender balance alone may not automatically lead to organisational reform or removing other gender imbalances, such as implicit bias within academia. Applying a gendered perspective on journals' work processes, management and workforce paves the way for thinking more generally regarding heterogeneity and intersectionality.


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