Why are women underused in the JECH peer review process?

M del Carmen Davo, C Vives, C Álvarez-Dardet

A descriptive analysis was performed based on means and standard deviations, frequencies and comparisons by sex of the percentages, results in each interest variables were also explored. SPSS 10 was used for these analyses.

METHOD

A descriptive analysis was performed based on means and standard deviations, frequencies and comparisons by sex of the percentages, results in each interest variables were also explored. SPSS 10 was used for these analyses.

DISCUSSION

Table 1: Referees recommended decisions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Men Number (%)</th>
<th>Women Number (%)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>28 (6.5)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With answer</td>
<td>403</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>803</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major revision</td>
<td>159 (39)</td>
<td>167 (42)</td>
<td>326</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor revision</td>
<td>109 (27)</td>
<td>112 (28)</td>
<td>221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rejection</td>
<td>75 (19)</td>
<td>68 (17)</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance</td>
<td>62 (15)</td>
<td>53 (13)</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Although this study cannot answer these questions our results confirm the trend observed in other studies and also add that male reviewers did not have better scores than their female counterparts in the other indicators related with time to answer and editor perceived quality.

This study suggests the existence of gender bias in JECH. Increasing women visibility in the peer review process could contribute to the amelioration of such a bias, but only partially. Peer review is mostly an anonymous activity, and it is not generally considered in the usual evaluations of scientific activity. Not only are women affected by invisibility, the peer review process is too. That is why senior, older and busy professionals—often male—usually have lower interest in collaborating as reviewers and usually get lower scores when the quality of the review process (acceptance rates, time to answer) is assessed. A policy of only increasing the participation of women in journals peer review could, in isolation, have perverse effects. Under the glass ceiling we could have women contributing anonymously to improve papers. So, what perhaps should be advocated is the promotion not only of women, but also of the visibility of the peer review activity in academic health sciences.

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