

## Under-representation of women in the editorial boards of medical and dental journals of Pakistan

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### Abstract

**Objective:** To explore the representation of females in the field of medical journal editing in Pakistan.

**Methods:** This cross-sectional study was conducted from July 3 to 15, 2015 at Combined Military Hospital, Lahore. After exploring the website of Pakistan Medical and Dental Council, we surveyed the website of each journal and from their latest available edition discerned the editorial board's gender composition. Designations of female members were noted. Data was analysed using SPSS 20.

**Results:** A total of 2342 members served on the editorial boards of 79 journals of which 410(17.51%) were females. The maximum strength of women in a single journal was 23/30(76.6%). There were no women in the editorial boards of 11 (13.92%) journals. Among others, there were 188 (45.9%) Members of Editorial Board, 39 (9.5%) Editors, 39 (9.5%) Associate Editors, 34 (8.3 %) Members Advisory Board, 22 (5.4%) Subject Editors, 10 (2.4%) Editors-in-chief, 8 (2.0%) Student Editors, 7 (1.7%) Statisticians, 3 (0.7%) Bibliographers, 2 (0.5%) Deputy Editors-in-chief, 1 (0.2%) Trainee Editor and 1(0.2%) epidemiologist.

**Conclusion:** There was a low representation of women in the field of journal editing. A number of factors may be incriminated for this poor visibility.

**Keywords:** Pakistan, Medical journals, Dental journals, Women in medicine, Editor, Editing, Research. (JPMA 67: 722; 2017)

### Introduction

Men and women are attracted to the medical profession for similar reasons. Despite the existence of a glass ceiling (leaky pipe syndrome), women are changing the face of the medical profession all over the world.<sup>1</sup> In the United States, by 2010 women made up 30.4% of physicians.<sup>2</sup> In the United Kingdom alone female medical students have outnumbered their male counterparts, where 49% general practitioners and 32% specialists are women.<sup>3</sup> On an average, women comprised 29%, 38% and 44% of the total number of doctors in the years 1990, 2000 and 2011 across the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries.<sup>4</sup>

As of June 30, 2015, the number of women registered with Pakistan Medical and Dental Council (PMDC) in medicine as general practitioners was 68,542 (46.05%) and as specialists the number was 9,212 (28.2%). The number of registered dental practitioners with basic degree was 9,292 (62.03%) and as specialists, it was 393(30.2%).<sup>5</sup>

Editors (the nomenclature changes with journals) are the decisive authority regarding journal content, direction and issues of concern. They don't only report research, but also help bridge the chasms between policy, practice and

research.<sup>6</sup> However, in doing so they also have to take into account the interests of the owners of the journal as well as those of its readers, authors, reviewers and board members. All of these do not always match. The position of an editor is considered synonymous with the station, stature and standing.

The current study was planned to explore the representation of women in the realm of editing medical and dental journals in Pakistan.

### Materials and Methods

This cross-sectional study was conducted from July 3 to 15, 2015 at Combined Military Hospital, Lahore. We noted down the names of medical and dental journals as enlisted on the official PMDC website. We then divided them into 2 groups: those in the general group published both medical and dental articles; and the dental group was specifically for dental publications.

The data was classified on the basis of female member's current location (both national and international).

We then surveyed the websites of all journals and from the latest available edition noted down the composition of their respective editorial boards.

Lists of the names of men and women serving in their editorial board were prepared. The gender was discerned from the names of the respective persons. If the gender of the individual member could not be ascertained, it was

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excluded from the list.

The respective designations were noted against their names and categorised.

Category I included Chief Editor, Deputy Editor-in-chief, Associate Editor, Senior Editor, Assistant Editor, Subject Editor, Co-Editor, Copy Editor, Trainee Editor and Student Editor.

Category II incorporated Members of Advisory Board, Editorial Board and Review Committee.

Category III integrated Editorial Coordinators, Statisticians, Bibliographers, Epidemiologists and Treasurers.

The data was analysed using SPSS 20. Frequencies and percentages were calculated.

## Results

PMDC website revealed there were 79 medical and dental journals published from Pakistan. A total of 2,342 members served on the editorial boards of these 79 journals. Gender of the individual members could not be ascertained in 18(0.76%) cases which were then excluded from the list, leaving 410 (17.51%) women for further analysis.

The maximum number of women serving on the editorial board in a single journal was 23/30(76.6%) in the Journal of the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Pakistan (JSOGP). This was followed by the Journal of Pakistan Medical Association (JPMA) having 21(36%) females and the Journal of Bahria University Medical & Dental College (JBUMDC) having 16(34.7%).

There were 11 (13.92%) journals that had no women on their editorial boards.

In the journals belonging to the general group, women representation was 392 (18.57%), while in the dental group it was 18 (7.75%). The representation of women in the editorial board as per journal group and designation

**Table-1:** Representation of women in the editorial board as per journal group and designation category.

Category	Frequency of groups		%
	General	Dental	
I	148 (6.32 %)	7 (0.29%)	37.80
II	226 (9.64 %)	11 (0.46%)	57.80
III	18 (0.76%)	0	4.39
Total	410 (17.51%)		

Category I: Chief Editor, Deputy Editor-in-chief, Associate Editor, Senior Editor Assistant Editor, Subject Editor, Co-Editor, Copy Editors, Trainee Editor and Student Editor.

Category II: Members of Editorial Board, Advisory Board and Review Committee.

Category III: Editorial Coordinators, Statisticians, Bibliographers, Epidemiologists and Treasurers.

**Table-2:** Representation of women in the editorial board of Pakistan's journals with impact factor.

Category	JPMA (n=59)	JCPSP (n=28)	JPMS (n=40)
I	5(8.4%)	3 (10.8%)	0
II	15 (26.4%)	3 (10.8%)	5 (12.5%)
III	1 (1.7%)	1 (3.5%)	1 (2.5%)
Total	21(36%)	7 (25%)	6 (15%)

Category I: Chief Editor, Deputy Editor-in-chief, Associate Editor, Senior Editor Assistant Editor, Subject Editor, Co-Editor, Copy Editors, Trainee Editor and Student Editor.

Category II: Members of Editorial Board, Advisory Board and Review Committee.

Category III: Editorial Coordinators, Statisticians, Bibliographers, Epidemiologists and Treasurers

JPMA: Journal of Pakistan Medical Association

JCPSP: Journal of the College of Physicians and Surgeons Pakistan.

JPMS: Journal of Pioneering Medical Sciences.

were worked out (Table-1).

Overall, 347 (84.6%) women were based in Pakistan, while 63 (15.4%) were stationed abroad.

In decreasing order of frequency, there were, among others, 188 (45.9%) Members of Editorial Board, 39 (9.5%) Editors, 39 (9.5%) Associate editors, 34 (8.3%) Members Advisory Board, 22 (5.4%) Subject Editors, 10 (2.4%) Editors-in-chief, 8 (2.0%) Student Editors, 7 (1.7%) Statisticians, 3 (0.7%) Bibliographers, 2 (0.5%) Deputy Editors-in-chief, 1(0.2%) Trainee Editor and 1(0.2%) Epidemiologist.

The representation of women on the editorial board of Pakistani journals with impact factor was noted separately (Table-2).

## Discussion

The participation of women in the editing field was found to be 17%. The proportion of women working as general practitioners in our doctors is 42%, while 28% are specialists. In dentistry, the ratios are 62% and 30%.

In journals belonging to the General group it is 18.57 % , while in the dental group it is 7.75 % . These numbers are less compared to their statistics in practice.<sup>3</sup>

The situation is not much different from that in the USA where a study of 39 professional medical society boards and 54 journal editorial boards conducted in 2004 showed that 17% of board members were women.<sup>7</sup> This study, compared to ours, shows more Editors-in-chief (16.7% vs 2.4%) and fewer Editors (4% vs 9.5%). This comparison shows a greater presence at senior level positions in the USA while in Pakistan there are more women at lower rungs.

Another study of 69 dentals journals published in 2015 revealed 14.8 % women in the editorial board compared to our 7.75%.<sup>8</sup> Female representation in dental journals is

even lesser despite the growing number of women opting for dentistry as a career.

In Pakistani journals, 10 (2.4%) women served in the capacity of Editors-in-chief. In a study based on the editorial boards of emergency medicine journals showed that the number of women was 49 (13.17%) and only 1 woman was Editor-in-chief.<sup>9</sup> Yet another study on 60 medical journals published in 2011 showed that 10 (15.9%) Editors-in-chief were women.<sup>10</sup>

Across the globe, journal editing is largely a male-dominated field. Undoubtedly women are changing the face of medical profession, but a number of factors contribute towards their low visibility in editorial boards. There are unrecognised psychological factors that lead to men being preferred over women. One such factor is the proverbial glass ceiling, which are non-physical barriers hampering women's efforts to achieve their true potential. Some of these are greater difficulty in handling job stress, pay discrepancies, family responsibilities, unfair hiring practices and limiting decision-making responsibilities to men. Due to lack of support, women become more focussed on clinical practice compared to research; hence very few achieve higher academic positions. Hostile working environment and non-existent guidance are also contributory factors. Women are burdened by traditional roles and expectations and, hence, face difficulties in bringing out the best in them.<sup>11-14</sup> Their presence on editorial board can play an active role in nurturing the skills of young females in the field of research and providing a feasible environment where they can function without barriers. Selection team for the journals must also work to eliminate any bias while selecting by giving equal opportunities to both males and females. The glass ceiling needs to be hit hard.

Despite the changed gender ratio of doctors, the poor representation of women in the editing field is to be worked on. Further research on the distribution of position, power and prestige must be taken to find out if it is the politics of gender at play or is it the hyper-masculine culture of a journal's work environment? Policy-makers need to reckon whether women have been systematically excluded from the editing processes or is it still a long ride home for them?

Our study focussed on the participation of women on the editorial boards in the year 2015 alone as previous records

of all the journals were not available for a retrospective study of the trends of female representation on boards. Lack of sufficient data from previous years was a limitation of our study.

## Conclusion

Women have a comparatively poor representation in the editorial board of medical and dental journals in Pakistan. There is a need to further study the causes of this poor representation of women as well as its effect on the academic aspects of medicine.

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**Conflict of Interest:** None.

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