

Side effects of publish-or-perish pressure on graduate studies

The main Brazilian journals in the Public Health field have enjoyed rapid growth in the number of new article submissions in recent years. In the case of *Cadernos de Saúde Pública*, the last five years (2003-2008) witnessed a leap from 531 to 1,279 annual submissions, while the acceptance rate dropped from 43% to 27%. This increase reflects not only the expansion of Brazil's scientific field, but also the trends in research funding policies and the growth of graduate studies in Public Health.

Like any broad and complex process, several issues related to science publishing deserve more in-depth reflection in our opinion. There is evidence that the increase in submissions is also at least partially due to certain practices recently adopted by graduate studies programs as a result of the pressure to publish. These include requiring students to submit articles for publication before they are allowed to conclude their Master's course study, to schedule their thesis presentations, or to receive their diplomas.

Not every Master's thesis is *necessarily* expected to involve original research or much less lead to a published article. Suffice it to recall the famous Sucupira Report, in 1965, which established the guidelines for graduate studies in Brazil: "*The Master's candidate is required to present a thesis... that demonstrates command over the chosen theme and capacity for systematization. A PhD degree requires presenting a dissertation based on research work that makes a real contribution to the body of knowledge on the theme*" [Rev Bras Educ 2005; (30):162-73].

In our view, to condition the conclusion of a Master's course on proof of article submission poses various problems. In particular, it requires a byproduct (in the form of an article) from an academic exercise (the Master's thesis) that from the conceptual point of view is not originally or necessarily designed for this purpose. The increase in the number of article submissions based on research of limited and local interest or scarcely original texts with sparse scientific relevance adds more pressure to the existing overload for editors and reviewers.

The evaluation of articles for publication involves a complex link between editors, the journal's back office, and *ad hoc* reviewers. The system is currently operating at the limit of its capacity to respond to multiple and successive demands for reviews and reports, not only from the journals, but also from research funding agencies. The Brazilian Public Health community, although flourishing and in continuous expansion, has experienced difficulty in meeting this enormous demand.

Nearly all of the research performed in graduate programs in Public Health in Brazil is financed with public funds. To disseminate the research via publication is an academic and social commitment. Nevertheless, the demands to produce articles, chapters, and books should not steamroll important principles, and the community should be alert to the implications for the scientific publishing media.

It is unquestionably relevant for us to increase the visibility of research in Public Health. The main Brazilian journals have striven to meet the growing publishing demand, always alert to the subtle balance between quantity and quality. Equally important is to raise the awareness of the various parties concerning the importance of ensuring the highest possible quality of articles submitted for publication.

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