Letters to Editor

A similar study done among the children of high socioeconomic status in Chennai showed that the mean weight of children was higher than the WHO reference value, showing that large intra-urban differences exist between children from different socioeconomic backgrounds. (6)

The prevalence of hypertension among the adults was 21.4%, and glucose intolerance was 8.6%. Hypertension and diabetes are considered lifestyle-related disorders but, they seem to be prevalent even among the poor. It must be stressed that the major proportion of these cases remains undiagnosed. Eye disorders like defective vision, cataract, and uncorrected myopia together were present in 22.5% of the surveyed population.

One distressing factor and issue of concern was the high prevalence of child abuse, with 23.7% of the children reporting abuse in the form of violence at home or on the streets. It has long been recognized that the environment in which a person lives significantly affects his/her health. Women and children have a double impact from exposure to the environmental pollution outside as well as from the toxic fumes of stove inside their ill ventilated huts leading to detrimental effects on health.

Other Indian studies done among slum dwellers have shown similar results about poor access to drinking water and sanitation facilities (7) and that the urban poor have inadequate access to health services. (8)

To conclude, the living and environmental conditions of the study subjects were poor. Our study found a high prevalence of infections, underweight, and undernutrition. Lifestyle-related disorders like hypertension and glucose intolerance, which were once considered ‘rich man’s diseases,’ are becoming common even among the poor. Illiteracy and unemployment being the root cause of all the problems must be urgently addressed. Strategies must be formulated for improvement of nutrition and sanitation. Last but not the least, provision of good and accessible healthcare facilities can definitely bring about some improvement in their health. A holistic, multisector approach is required to develop an integrated and cost-effective method to improve the standard of living and health service delivery to the poor.

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Duplicate Publications: Time to Ring Alarm Bells

Sir,

A redundant or duplicate publication is a publication of a scientific paper that overlaps substantially with one already published. (1)

As per “Guidelines on Good Publication Practice,” (2) the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) defined that a redundant publication occurs when two or more papers, without full cross references, share the same hypothesis, data, discussion points or conclusions.

According to Reeves et al., the defining characteristics of a duplicate publication is that in addition to the above, it shares at least some of the same authors. (3)
As an example, the article titled “Fertility profile and its correlates in a rural population of Dehradun district” was published as letter to editor in *Indian Journal of Community Medicine* (IJCM 2007;32(2):152-3) and as original research article in *Indian Journal of Preventive and Social Medicine* (Ind J PSM 2007;38(3):142-49).

An act of Professional Misconduct-why?

The reader after reading the same article in two different journals may falsely substantiate the same observation and place greater reliance on evidence that appears to have been confirmed in more than one study. Moreover, it leads to wastage of valuable space in the journal as well as precious time of the editor. As a consequence, a deserving article might get rejected.

Also, the results of meta-analysis might get biased because of the same observation being repeated in two different journals. Tramer *et al.* concluded in their study that inclusion of duplicated data in meta-analysis led to a 23% overestimation of Ondansetron’s antiemetic efficacy. (4)

However, some persons are of the view that as journals have different readership, this leads to wider accessibility of the scientific materials to the readers, (5) but in this era of electronic/internet revolution this point seems to be invalid.

Possible reason: The most important reason may be deliberate or intentional duplication of the research article in order to increase the number of publications that is unfortunately a basic requirement for career progression in medical profession. Similar apprehensions are also expressed by Dr. AJ Singh in his article titled Plagiarising Plagiarism. (6)

Recommended actions: In the light of above discussion, it is evident that the problem of duplicate publications is an issue that needs immediate attention on the part of both editors and readers. The actions to be taken in such cases range from retracting the article to issuing a ban on further publications of such authors.

According to COPE Guidelines, the editor has to investigate and label the misconduct as serious or less serious followed by decision on what action to be taken when such misconduct is noticed or reported. The Guidelines provide a list of Sanctions that may be applied separately or combined ranging from a letter of warning to as serious as reporting the case to the General Medical Council or other such authority for appropriate action.

Safeguards

- Increasing awareness among authors and readers regarding this issue.
- Before submitting an article for publication, the authors should consult the ‘Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts submitted to Biomedical journals. (7)
- Prompt reporting of such misconduct is the moral responsibility of the readers as well.
- Most importantly, the editors have a pivotal role to play in prevention of duplicate publications.

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