

Composition of editorial boards of health science journals in the Eastern Mediterranean Region

*Jane Nicholson and Olla Shideed,
WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean, Cairo*

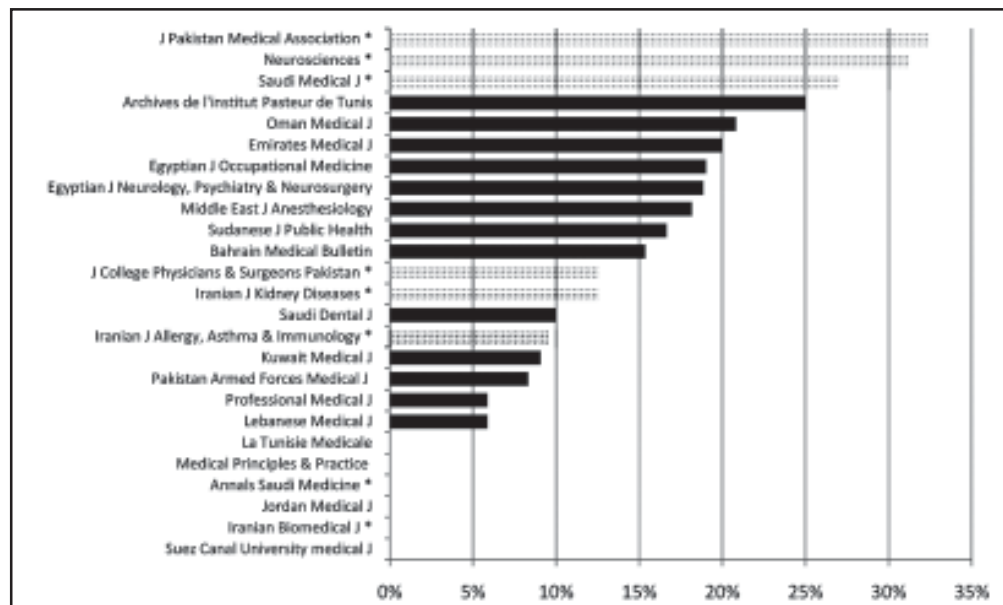
The position of women in many countries of the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region is changing as access to education improves and some of the barriers to participation in society fall. Health science journals play an important role in acknowledgement of scientific achievement and determination of academic rank. Editor-in chief and editorial board member have critical impact in decision-making with regard to what scientific material gets published and disseminated. They are also powerful role models for participation and leadership in medicine generally and medical science in particular. Women's representation on the editorial boards of these prestigious institutions serves as a proxy indicator for women's advancement in science and for their participation in decision-making with regard to what gets published.

We analysed the composition of editorial boards of health science journals across the Region between 2000 and 2010 to see whether women's participation is keeping pace with their representation in higher education, and whether journals' leadership is truly representative of their constituencies. Journals were selected from the Index Medicus for the Eastern Mediterranean (IMEMR) for which copies were available in the WHO library for the first issue of each of 2000, 2005 and 2010. We obtained results for 13 journals from 2000 to 2010. Of these, the Journal of the Pakistan Medical Association has consistently over 10 years had the highest percentage of female board members. Saudi Medical Journal, Neurosciences, Oman Medical Journal, Emirates Medical journal, the Professional Medical Journal, Saudi Dental Journal and the Journal of College of Physicians and Surgeons Pakistan seem to have made a positive effort to increase the number of females on the board, particularly since 2005. Four journals now have fewer members than they had in 2005: Bahrain Medical Journal, Suez Canal University Medical Journal, Lebanese Medical Journal, Pakistan Armed Forces Medical Journal. One journal, Annals of Saudi Medicine has had no female board members in the time period. When we included journals for which 2000 and 2005 data were not available and all medline in-

dexed journals for which it was possible to determine sex of editorial board members, of 25 journals, all except one, Journal of the Pakistan Medical Association, have a male editor. The representation of females among editorial board members ranged from 0% (6 journals) to 32% (Figure-1).

This is a preliminary study and there were a number of limitations. Among these, many journals were unavailable and websites not kept up to date so it was difficult to get a broad range across all countries. Editorial boards are not always named as such by journals, thus identification of the board was questionable in some cases. Some do not list the editorial board, and some journals list board members by initial only. Some editorial boards contain a high proportion of members from outside the country, blurring the border between editorial and international advisory boards. It was not possible at this time to obtain actual data for M:F ratios among students and faculty of medical schools in the region.

With a current range of 0% to 32% representation on editorial boards, journals are clearly not representative of their constituencies. However the results and conclusions are not very dissimilar to results from the North. A 2003 study of north American journals, found a range of 0% to 47 % female board members (Keiser et al, 2003). A study of 16 prominent north American and UK journals found that, in 2005, female representation ranged from 7% to 43% (Jagsi et al 2008).



* Medline indexed journals (represented also by lighter bars in the graph)

Figure-1. Percentage of females on editorial boards among journals within WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region, 2010