

## Science has no Borders, so Should Scientific Publishing: A Position Statement from the *Journal of Physical Activity and Health*

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In a recent commentary in *Infant and Child Development*, Draper and colleagues highlighted the issue of publication bias in the field of child development, where research from countries in which the majority of the world's population lives is unacceptably underrepresented in most academic journals.<sup>1</sup> These countries are collectively referred to as the Majority World, low- and middle-income countries, or the Global South, and in this position statement, we refer to them as the Majority World. Draper and colleagues shared their painful experience of constantly having to deal with editors' and reviewers' unfair judgment regarding the 'fit' of the studies based on where they come from. As most editors at the *Journal of Physical Activity and Health (JPAH)* are from and/or currently work in the Majority World, such experience sounds all too familiar to us.

*JPAH* finds such biases unacceptable not only because they violate the principles of fairness, equity, diversity, and inclusion, but also because they do a huge disservice to science. Physical activity is a context-specific behavior that can be defined, (de)valued, operationalized, and promoted differently with varying motivations and needs across cultures, countries, and climates. For most people living in the Minority World (ie, high-income countries), physical activity may be synonymous with exercise, which is conducted volitionally for health benefits and enjoyment. In Majority World countries, physical activity is more likely to take place at work and during transport, often by necessity rather than choice, and sometimes in harmful or dangerous conditions.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, public health surveillance may capture different aspects of physical activity, epidemiological research on physical activity and health may reveal different patterns, and the meaning of effective physical activity interventions and policies could be dramatically different across countries with disparate economic development status; sociodemographic characteristics; political, economical, and social structures; and cultures. Evidence from all countries/regions is equally valuable as it provides opportunities for us to learn from each other, enriches

the diversity of the field, and helps us collectively understand and tackle the pandemic of physical inactivity.<sup>3</sup>

As the flagship journal for the field of physical activity research, *JPAH* takes a strong stance on the issues of fairness, equity, diversity, and inclusion. In January 2021, our Editor-in-Chief Pedro Hallal, who had just stepped into a leadership role at the Journal, pledged *JPAH*'s commitment to 'Going Global'.<sup>4</sup> The Journal's current editorial and leadership team, including the Editorial Board, represents researchers from 28 countries/regions across all inhabited continents. Such diverse representation is not tokenistic, but it is a true reflection of our dedication to minimize unconscious biases at the structural level. We have a clear policy about not excluding articles based on the cultural, linguistic, and geographical origins of the research, and we are committed to equitable representation of quality research publications from the Majority World. For *JPAH*, 'fit' does not focus on whether research originates from a given world region or uses methods, theories, or instruments developed in Minority World countries; instead, 'fit' is determined by whether the research is centrally focused on the intersection of physical activity and health (ie, the Journal's Mission). As the Journal has recently leveled up public dissemination of research, we are making efforts to promote *all* articles we publish equally and equitably. For example, to highlight research from the Majority World without placing extra burden on researchers from those countries, we have made articles from the Majority World freely accessible for the first three months of publication.

These deliberate efforts have led to some promising outcomes as we build a truly global physical activity research network. Of the 70 research articles *JPAH* has published through the first 10 issues of 2022, more than one-third of them are either focused on or led by researchers from the Majority World. We see this as a sign of early success of our 'Going Global' policies. However, we are aware that we are still at an early stage of addressing the historical issue of the Minority–Majority Worlds divide in scientific publishing. Challenges remain: for example, how do editors and reviewers objectively judge a paper's scientific quality if authors are limited by

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linguistic abilities in English writing and how do we provide editorial support to authors from a non-English speaking background, particularly those with constrained resources and who cannot afford professional language editing? How do we support free access to articles for researchers from the Majority World? How do we attract and support more researchers from the Majority World to submit their best work to our journal?

We are keen to work with the physical activity research community to tackle these challenges and further improve equitable representation of the research we publish. We congratulate Draper and colleagues on shedding light on this critical historic issue which has been disproportionately impacting researchers from the Majority World. At *JPAH*, we welcome physical activity research from all cultures, countries, and climates and we encourage our editorial leadership, reviewers, authors, and readers to actively reflect on the aforementioned challenges and help reduce publication bias based on where we live, work, and play.

## References

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