Referee Anxiety in Health Researches: A Challenge of Referees

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A B S T R A C T

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In addition to the researchers, referees have important roles for publishing a valuable scholarly paper. A scientific work is evaluated in different phases from the beginning till it is published. In each of these phases, unpleasant experiences may happen for researchers and referees. Researchers as the producers of scientific papers experience research anxiety, library anxiety, information seeking anxiety, and referee anxiety. On the other hand, referees experience referees' anxiety. So it is very important to recognize the effective factors causing anxiety and try to eliminate these problems.
As the research area is very broad, all these mentioned concepts are parts of the research process. But one of the most critical stages of research is the review of scientific works particularly in the field of health. "The selection of the referee is the most important decision that the editors make about a scientific work" (1). Referee selection is very important in the area of health because the results of these researches have direct or indirect effects on public health (2).
If the facilities are not properly provided for referees, many problems may occur including anxiety referee. Findings of Von Glinow and Novelli showed that there was an unpleasant sense for referees when they feel particular biases from the editor (3).
Weller also states that there is an unpleasant sensation if the authors identify their referees (4). Other factors that cause anxiety during the referee process are: receiving several papers to review (5), selecting an inappropriate referee for a paper by the editor (6), lack of clear guidelines and standards of review (4), young and inexperienced referees and inappropriate behavior of journal staff and research centers, lack of scientific knowledge of the referee, and lack of enough ability for the referee to reject the article, all causing unpleasant feelings. In a simple definition, referee anxiety includes any discomfort of referee during reviewing a scientific work. The referee anxiety theme has been extracted from the library anxiety subjects (7-9) but necessary changes were made to cope with the recent matter. Now what factors create referee anxiety?

Factors regarding feeling of discomfort with the journal or research center
Lack of rules and guidelines of the journal or research center for reviewing articles, lack of confidential review results, unpleasant experience of reviewing in another journal or research center, sometimes complex rules of the review process, lack of referee's familiarity with new technologies and also time shortage of referees can cause them not to feel relaxed and comfortable during review of the articles, thus creating referee anxiety.

Factors regarding the journal staff or research center
Sometimes, referees think no one answer their questions in journal office or research center because of being so busy or reluctant, so they think there are no guidelines for facing problems. This may cause referee anxiety.

Factors regarding the referees' writing or research skills
Lack of familiarity with some skills, such as information literacy, information seeking, research methodology, effective criticism, writing skills, statistical methods, research ethics, citation styles, the level of article or journal and the subject of article can cause anxiety among referees.

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Technical factors

On the one hand, the need for using mechanical devices such as computers, electronic refereeing systems, the printer and so on, and on the other hand the inability of referees for using these tools and also the lack of clear guidelines for the use of these tools can be the causes of anxiety.

Emotional factors

Feelings of inadequacy to review controversial topics (politics, religion, etc.), bias in review, hesitation after the review, nepotism (from the journal or others), lack of confidence in referees, and consequences after the review from researchers are some other factors which cause anxiety among referees.

Referees are faced with different stresses regarding the review of health papers. These pressures can cause discomfort in this process. Referee anxiety can affect their professional operation and the quantity and quality of published scientific papers. The number of reviews may decrease and the referees' health might be affected. So some measures can be taken to change negative feelings into positive and pleasurable ones for referees, for example eliminating the stressors, designing an appropriate referee electronic system, helping the referees in the review process, keeping the review results confidential, allocating sufficient time for the referees, getting familiar with library and appropriate use of its data for review, mastery of the research methods by referees, and good relationship with the journal and research centers' staff.

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