

## Commentry

### Analysis of Proportion of Female Editors-in-Chief in Major Immunology Medical Journals

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#### Introduction

Editors-in-chief (EIC) of medical journals have the paramount responsibility of directing the dissemination of peer-reviewed medical information and influencing contemporary clinical practices. While previous literature has assessed gender differences in the allergy and immunology physician workforce [1], the percentage of female EICs leading immunology medical journals remains unknown. In this cross-sectional study, we ascertained the proportion of high-impact immunology medical journals with female EICs and whether there was an association between impact factor and EIC gender.

#### Methods

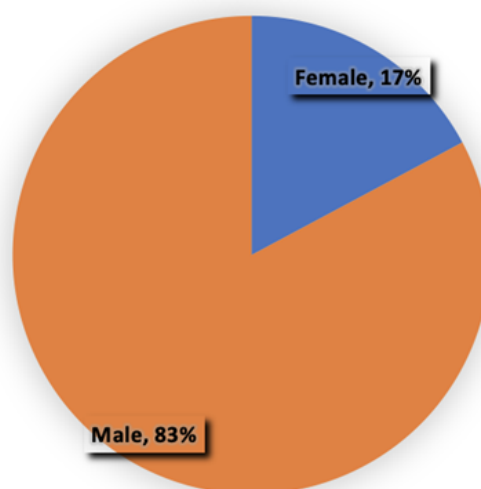
Journals listed on the Clarivate Web of Science 2020 Journal Citations Report (JCR) [2], were searched applying the immunology filter. All immunology journals listed on the 2020 JCR were included (Table 1). EICs were identified using each journal's official website. For our analysis, we considered an EIC to be the officially listed "editor-in-chief", "chief editor", "executive editor", or "managing editor" of each journal. For each journal, we recorded the journal name, impact factor, and EIC names. For each EIC, we recorded their

gender and professional degree. Adopting the previous methodology [3], gender was classified as male or female and was elucidated based on their name and accompanying profile picture and biography on the journal website, when available. When profile pictures were unavailable, EIC gender was determined using a readily available online Application Programming Interface (API) [4,5]. Adapting the previous methodology [6], EIC professional degree was identified from the journal website when provided or through the EIC's uploaded curriculum vitae or LinkedIn profile [7] (Figure 1).

	Overall, n (%)
Number of journals <sup>a</sup>	177 (100.0)
Impact factor, median (IQR)	4.092 (2.829 – 6.303)
Number of journals with a singular editor-in-chief	136 (76.8)
Number of journals with >1 editor-in-chief	41 (23.2)
Number of journals with at least one female editor-in-chief	34 (19.2)
Number of journal editor-in-chiefs	227 (100.0)
Professional degree of editor-in-chief	
• MD, only	72 (31.7)
• PhD, only	91 (40.1)
• MD, PhD	37 (16.3)
Gender of editor-in-chief*	
• Male	188 (82.8)
• Female	39 (17.2)

**Table 1 :** Characteristics of the included medical journals and editors-in-chief.

<sup>a</sup>There was no significant difference between mean impact factors of immunology journals with male editors-in-chief and immunology journals with female editors-in-chief on independent-samples Mann-Whitney U test, P=0.78



**Figure 1:** Female representation of editors-in-chief of immunology medical journals listed on 2020 Clarivate Web of Science 2020 Journal Citations Report.

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Three authors (SA, SM and & RP) independently obtained the data, with disagreements resolved by the senior author (AA). Categorical variables were reported as counts and percentages, and continuous variables as medians with Interquartile Range (IQR) after assessing for normality. Independent-samples Mann-Whitney U test was used to find associations between journal impact factor and EIC gender. A 2-tailed  $P < .05$  was considered statistically significant for all conducted analyses. Statistical analyses were performed using SPSS software version 27 (IBM, Chicago, IL, USA).

## Results

We identified 177 immunology medical journals; of these, 136 (76.8%) had a single EIC and 41 (23.2%) had more than one EIC yielding a sample size of 227 EICs. The median impact factor was 4.092 (IQR 2.829-6.303). 34 (19.2%) of the journals had at least one female EIC. Of the 227 EICs, 72 (31.7%) had an MD degree, 91 (40.1%) had a Ph.D. degree, and 37 (16.3%) had an MD/Ph.D. 39 (17.2%) of the EICs were females and 188 (82.8%) were males. There was no significant difference in journal impact factor between male and female EICs ( $p=0.78$ ).

## Discussion

To our knowledge, this is the first study to comprehensively assess the association between the impact factor of immunology medical journals and EIC gender. We found that only 17.2% of EICs of immunology medical journals were female. In our analysis, the impact factor of a journal did not influence the gender of the EIC.

Our study has limitations. Only immunology medical journals listed in the 2020 JCR ranking were included for analysis and our results may not be an accurate representation for all immunology journals. Additionally, we could not account for any errors in the 2020 JCR rankings. Finally, our study categorized gender as male or female and we were unable to capture alternative EIC gender or sexual identities.

In the past, a great deal of controversy has been directed towards the lack of gender representation on journal editorial boards [8]. The disparity between the number of male and female EICs leading high-impact immunology medical journals is a point of concern, particularly when considering that the content published in these journals may influence clinical practices at both a domestic and international level. As women continue to be increasingly represented at the highest levels of medicine [9], immunology medical journals may consider seeking more qualified female experts to lead their editorial boards and improve representation.

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