

Author Numbers in Indian Pediatrics—Going against the tide!

Author numbers in most biomedical journals all over the world have shown a steady increase over the years(1,2). The ‘publish or perish’ mindset has placed enormous pressure on researchers. Authorship disputes continue to exist inspite of there being published guidelines for authorship(3). The present study was carried out to study the author numbers in papers published in Indian Pediatrics. A total of 2161 articles published in Indian Pediatrics over a 15 year period from 1986 to 2003 (excluding 1988, 1991 & 1992) were studied with respect to author numbers. Eight hundred and two original papers and 1359 brief/case reports were analyzed. The mean number of authors per article each year along with articles with five or more authors and those with single or two authors for both original articles and case/brief reports are shown in *Table 1*. The mean number of authors per article showed minimal variation over the years. In fact, the number of papers submitted by 5 or more authors for brief/case reports has shown a downward trend over the past 4 years.

Although newer research technologies have necessitated more extensive collaboration and could partly explain the rising author numbers, very frequently authorship has a volitional component to it(4). One of the major factors responsible for rising author numbers in bio-medical journals is the conferral of “gift” authorship.

It is our personal opinion that authorship of medical journals in India has been a largely ignored issue with only few researchers being well versed with the Vancouver guidelines. Authorship is, on many occasions, a decision determined by the position held by the senior

member/s involved in the paper. Not uncommonly, junior researchers also violate authorship norms by including a renowned senior member as a co-author in a paper so as to increase the chances of publication.

Our study has shown that Indian Pediatrics has been successful in reigning in author numbers, which is an encouraging sign in an era of multi-authored articles and rising authorship disputes(5). While institutions and editors have been laying stress on the enforcement of authorship standards over the years, authors on their part must also be prepared to accept public responsibility for their work.

The authorship issue has not been given the importance that it deserves by the Indian medical fraternity. There is a serious need for an authorship debate, which in the due course of time should aid in healing bleeding hearts and dented egos that this issue leaves many researchers with.

Inderpreet Sohi*,
Naveen Kakkar**,

*Departments of Pediatrics * & Pathology**,
Christian Medical College & Hospital,
Ludhiana-141008, India.
E-mail: n_kakkar@satyam.net.in*

*Correspondence to:
Dr. Inderpreet Sohi,
Reader.*

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TABLE I—Mean Number of Authors per Year with Range, the Percentage of Articles with Five or More and One or Two Authors for both original articles and Case/Brief Reports Yearwise.

Year	Mean (Range) Number of authors (Original articles)	Mean (Range) number of authors (Case/Brief Reports)	Percentage of Original articles with 5 or more authors	Percentage of Case/Brief Reports with 5 or more authors	Percentage of Original articles with 1 or 2 authors	Percentage of Case/Brief Reports with 1 or 2 authors
1986	4.0 (1-8)	4.0 (2-7)	32.3	28.6	16.1	11.4
1987	3.7 (1-8)	3.9 (1-7)	25.5	36.2	22.3	13.8
1989	3.8 (1-8)	3.9 (1-7)	31.1	35.1	20.8	18.2
1990	4.1 (1-10)	3.9 (1-7)	39.0	25.0	18.6	13.3
1993	4.3 (1-12)	3.7 (1-11)	44.0	32.1	18.7	14.5
1994	3.9 (1-8)	4.1 (1-7)	37.9	30.0	19.4	17.7
1995	4.3 (1-10)	3.8 (1-8)	37.2	31.9	14.1	22.7
1996	4.3 (2-8)	3.7 (1-8)	40.4	30.8	14.9	23.0
1997	4.1 (2-9)	3.8 (1-6)	35.9	12.9	12.8	16.8
1998	4.7 (2-10)	3.5 (1-8)	48.8	36.2	9.7	21.2
1999	4.6 (1-12)	3.9 (1-9)	25.0	26.0	21.4	15.7
2000	4.0(2-10)	3.8 (1-12)	53.6	31.3	15.6	16.1
2001	4.8 (2-8)	3.9 (1-7)	52.0	23.4	16.0	13.5
2002	4.6 (2-9)	3.9 (2-9)	52.9	21.1	23.5	12.8
2003	4.4 (2-10)	3.6 (1-8)	41.0	16.1	15.8	15.0