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Publishing HIV/AIDS behavioural science reports: An author's guide

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to report on characteristics of journals that publish manuscripts in the HIV/AIDS behavioural science realm, with the goal of providing assistance to authors seeking to disseminate their work in the most appropriate outlet. Fifty journals who publish behavioural research on HIV/AIDS in English were identified through library and electronic searches. Although ten of the journals focused specifically on HIV/AIDS, the majority of journals are in related fields, including health psychology/behavioural medicine, sexual behaviour, substance abuse, public health/prevention or general medicine. Acceptance rates ranged from 8–89% with a mean acceptance rate of 39%. Reported review times ranged from 1–12 months with three months the mode, while publication lag following acceptance averages six months. Acceptance rates were related to impact factors, with more selective journals evidencing higher impact factors. The variety of publication outlets available to authors of HIV/AIDS behavioural science studies creates ample opportunity for dissemination, as well as challenge for readers in discerning the quality of published work.

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to report on characteristics of journals that publish HIV/AIDS behavioural science reports. As the epidemic has expanded and persisted, numerous HIV/AIDS specialty journals have emerged that accept and publish scientific research articles. In addition, journals in other fields have expanded their foci to include HIV/AIDS research. There is a need to identify the types of journals that might be appropriate targets for HIV/AIDS behavioural research and to describe their characteristics.

Methods

Modifying the methodologies of two previous papers on publishing in addiction (Arciniega & Miller, 1997) and criminal justice (Vaughn et al., 2004), we sought to identify peer-reviewed journals that accepted HIV/AIDS behavioural manuscripts, to identify their salient characteristics and to provide guidance to authors. We identified a set of 61 candidate journals that use peer-review and publish behavioural HIV/AIDS research by: (1) examining references of our own collections of published HIV/AIDS behavioural reports, (2) searching electronic databases using the terms HIV and/or AIDS paired with behaviour, prevention and intervention and (3) examining journals in six areas (HIV/AIDS, health psychology/behavioural medicine,

sexual behaviour, substance abuse, public health/prevention and general medicine) for HIV/AIDS behavioural content. Information on each journal was gleaned from internet information provided as instructions for authors, examination of hard copies of the journals and through a one-page, 17-item survey faxed to the editors in November 2002. Using an iterative contact method over 18 months, we received some response from 82% of editors, resulting in data on 50 journals.

Journal attributes were categorised as: (1) content and scope, (2) author logistics and (3) selectivity and impact. These characteristics of journals were selected because they were of interest to authors deciding where to submit a manuscript and may provide information about the relative difficulty of publishing in various journals.

Analyses

Acceptance rates were calculated by dividing the annual manuscripts published by those received. The strength and direction of the relationship among acceptance rate and impact ratings for each journal were evaluated using Pearson correlations.

Results

Table 1 provides information on the journals' characteristics.

Content and author logistics

The average number of issues published was ten, with a range of 3–51 and a mode of six. Journals varied by field in their proportion of article content, shown in Table 2. Nearly all publish empirical research reports, while 94% publish review or theoretical papers, 86% publish commentaries or book reviews, 60% publish case studies and 54% publish brief reports. Editors reported that 64% of the articles they publish are empirical (range 0–99%), 14% are brief reports (range 0–100%), 22% are review or theoretical papers (range 0–100%), 5% are case reports (range 0–25%) and 10% are commentaries and book reviews (range 0–30%). The majority of journals require American Medical Association or American Psychological Association citation and reference formats, although many require variations on these styles such as the Vancouver, Harvard or Chicago reference systems. Many journals have added electronic submission of initial manuscripts as an option (67%) and, of these, some (15%) require electronic submission. Journals average three-and-a-half months for the review process, followed by six months from acceptance to publication. Page charges are an uncommon practice among the journals, evident in only one medical journal.

Selectivity

The number of manuscripts received annually by these 50 journals totaled 38,277 but journals varied in the number of manuscripts they received from a low of 24 to a high of 7,800. When the two outliers on each end were removed, the average review burden per journal is 514 manuscripts per year. Together, the 50 journals publish a total of 8,384 articles per year, averaging 175 articles per journal (range 15–1,560). All but four editors provided enough information to allow calculation of an acceptance rate. Editors' estimates of manuscripts received and published were for 2002–2003. Although the calculated acceptance rate does not take into account those manuscripts whose receipt, review, revision and publication span more than one year, this acceptance rate should provide a rough estimate of the difficulty of publishing a manuscript in that journal. The acceptance rate for the 92% of journals for which it could be calculated ranged from 8–89% and averaged 39%.

In general, medical journals evidenced the highest impact factors and rehabilitation journals the lowest. It was also of interest to determine if acceptance rate was related to the Journal

Citation Reports variables regarding journal impact (Thompson Company, 2004). The results of correlation analysis between acceptance rate and impact factors showed significant Pearson correlations ($p < 0.05$ in each case). Acceptance rate was inversely related to the impact factor, ($r = -0.46$), the total citations ($r = -0.39$), the immediacy factor ($r = -0.39$) and the cited half-life (-0.17). Journals reporting the lowest acceptance rates tended to have higher total citations, impact factors immediacy factors and cited half-lives.

Conclusions

Authors will find that there are numerous potential outlets for their behavioural HIV/AIDS manuscripts. The journals we surveyed publish over 8,300 new manuscripts per year, with 39% of published papers describing behavioural interventions and 23% describing epidemiological, correlational or observational studies. Many journals outside the HIV/AIDS field publish at least some articles related to HIV and AIDS. The mean acceptance rate of 39% is comparable to published acceptance rates of medical, psychiatry, psychology and epidemiology journals, while stricter than the 53% acceptance rate reported for the typical addiction journal (Arciniega & Miller, 1997). Authors should consider the selectivity and impact of journals in addition to the typical content of journals or the field they represent when submitting high quality, carefully prepared manuscripts to maximise the chance of matching their manuscript to the best-fitting journal.

Regarding limitations, we tried to include all journals that appeared to publish behavioural HIV/AIDS articles, our method may have missed some journals that would be open to publishing HIV/AIDS behavioural studies and some editors of HIV/AIDS-specific journals did not wish to participate.

While the large number of journals and articles published may seem positive to authors, both the number and multidisciplinary nature of the journals may make it difficult for readers to judge the quality of HIV/AIDS behavioural reports. Although this concern is reduced to some extent because the journals surveyed all utilize the peer-review process, it is well-known among authors that the review process itself varies in its rigor. While the JCR data on such indices as the impact factor add some measure of objectivity, such indices are flawed and do not pertain to any individual article. Readers must still rely on their own scientific training and evaluate each paper carefully to ascertain its value to their research or clinical work in HIV/AIDS.

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References

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- Vaughn MS, Del Carmen RV, Perfecto M, Charand KX. Journals in criminal justice and criminology: An updated and expanded guide for authors. *Journal of Criminal Justice Education* 2004;1:61–128.

Table 1

Characteristics of journals that publish HIV/AIDS behavioural reports.

Journal, contact info	Percent of Content					Logistics				Selectivity			Impact				
	Iss	Basic science	Int-M	Int-B	Epi	Submit	Cite format	Ref format	Rev lag	Pub lag	Annual manuscripts received	Annual articles pub	Accept rate	2003 Total cited	2003 Impact factor	2003 Immed factor	Cited half-life
Derm-Venereologica /www.acta.dermato-venereo-logica.c.se/ tion /www.addictionjournal.org	6	0.30	0.60	0.02	0.08	B	Van	Van	2.0	5.0	390	149	0.38	3283	1.558	0.167	10.0
Sexual Health /www.addictedmag.com	12	0.10	0.10	0.30	0.50	B	APA	Van	3.0	6.0	325	153	0.47	4335	3.241	1.006	5.1
Sexual Health /www.kluweronline.com/issn/1090-7165/contents	18	0.30	0.40	0.15	0.15	B	AMA	AMA	3.0	3.0	1401	350	0.25	15234	5.521	0.994	4.3
Sexual Health /www.tandf.co.uk/journals/titles/09540121.asp	12	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	B	APA	APA	6.0	2.0	6760	1352	0.20	Not indexed	Not indexed	Not indexed	Not indexed
Sexual Health /www.guilford.com/cgi-bin/cartscript.cgi?page=/ ideals/jnat.htm&cart_id	8	0.68	0.00	0.25	0.07	B	APA	APA	4.0	12.0	n/a	86	n/a	1025	1.190	0.145	5.1
Sexual Health /www.hebertpub.com/AM/Default.aspx	7	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	M	APA	APA	3.0	3.0	143	50	0.35	839	0.973	0.154	6.6
Sexual Health /www.hebertpub.com/AM/Default.aspx	12	0.04	0.48	0.26	0.23	M	AMA	AMA	2.0	3.0	97	86	0.89	421	1.169	0.148	3.5
Sexual Health /www.hebertpub.com/AM/Default.aspx	4	0.00	0.20	0.60	0.20	B	Chic	Chic	2.0	10.0	48	16	0.33	56	0.000	n/a	n/a
Sexual Health /www.kluweronline.com/issn/0091-0562/Contents	18	0.59	0.35	0.00	0.06	B	AMA	AMA	1.0	4.0	304	175	0.58	4366	2.291	0.248	5.6
Sexual Health /www.healthpromotionjournal.com	6	0.30	0.30	0.30	0.10	M	APA	APA	3.0	12.0	217	36	0.17	1770	1.232	1.054	9.8
Sexual Health /www.Ajpm-Online.Net	6	0.00	0.00	0.90	0.05	B	AMA	AMA	6.0	4.0	120	40	0.33	1006	1.566	0.267	6.6
Sexual Health /www.Ajpm-Online.Net	4	0.00	0.00	0.90	0.10	M	APA	APA	4.0	6.0	200	70	0.35	2248	1.347	n/a	9.1
Sexual Health /www.Ajpm-Online.Net	8	0.00	0.25	0.65	0.10	E	AMA	AMA	3.0	3.0	360	160	0.44	3305	3.256	1.729	4.4
Sexual Health /www.Ajpm-Online.Net	12	0.00	0.00	0.20	0.80	E	AMA	AMA	6.0	2.0	7800	1560	0.20	15744	3.363	0.682	7.9
Sexual Health /www.Ajpm-Online.Net	4	0.20	0.00	0.40	0.40	B	AMA	AMA	3.0	5.0	130	32	0.25	1223	2.878	0.467	5.6
Sexual Health /www.Ajpm-Online.Net	24	0.03	0.30	0.03	0.30	B	AMA	AMA	2.5	3.0	1980	240	0.12	36590	12.427	2.747	8.8

Jl	Journal, contact info	Percent of Content					Logistics			Selectivity			Impact				
		Basic science	Int-M	Int-B	Epi	Submit	Cite format	Ref format	Rev lag	Pub lag	Annual manuscripts received	Annual articles pub	Accept rate	2003 Total cited	2003 Impact factor	2003 Immed factor	Cited half-life
12	ives General Psychiatry //Archpsyc.Ama-Assn.Org/	0.35	0.25	0.20	0.20	M	AMA	AMA	2.5	4.5	750	100	0.13	25635	10.519	1.644	10.0
24	ives Internal Medicine intermed@Jama-Archives.Org	0.05	0.60	0.10	0.25	E	AMA	AMA	2.0	6.0	1500	300	0.20	25669	6.758	1.697	6.7
6	ives Sex Behaviour //Www.Kluweronline.Com/Issn/0004-0002/Contents	0.65	0.05	0.15	0.15	M	APA	APA	3.0	12.0	80	68	0.85	1032	1.718	0.375	9.7
3	ivivoural Medicine //Www.Heldref.Org/Bridg	0.00	0.00	0.95	0.00	B	AMA	AMA	4.0	2.0	24	19	0.79	378	0.824	0.000	7.7
51	sh Medical Journal v.Submit.Bnj.Com	0.02	0.25	0.10	0.20	E	AMA	AMA	0.5	2.0	6000	500	0.08	55159	7.209	2.677	7.1
12	& Alcohol Dependence //Ees.Elsevier.Com/Dat	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25	E	Harv	Harv	3.0	5.0	300	93	0.31	3680	2.903	0.315	5.5
6	th Education & Behaviour* //Www.Sph.Umich.Edu/Hbhe/Heb/	0.00	0.00	0.53	0.47	M	AMA	AMA	3.0	12.0	114	40	0.35	643	1.153	0.710	5.0
6	th Education Research //Her.Oupjournals.Org/	0.00	0.10	0.80	0.10	B	APA	APA	3.0	9.0	100	30	0.30	1025	1.358	0.286	6.1
6	th Psychology //www.apa.org/journals/psa.html	0.45	0.00	0.50	0.05	M	APA	APA	3.0	6.0	340	75	0.22	4071	2.347	0.213	8.4
12	ational Journal STD & AIDS .rsmpress.co.uk/std.htm	0.10	0.60	0.10	0.20	M	Van	Van	0.8	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	not indexed	not indexed	not indexed	
15	PS .jajids.com	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	B	AMA	AMA	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	6069	3.681	0.625	4.5
4	hal Of Addictive Diseases v.Asam.Org/Jol/Journal.htm	0.25	0.30	0.30	0.35	M	AMA	AMA	11.5	8.0	50	28	0.56	475	1.672	0.036	5.4
3	cohol & Drug Education .unomaha.edu/~healthed/JADE.html	0.10	0.20	0.60	0.10	B	APA	APA	4.0	8.0	40	15	0.38	not indexed	not indexed	not indexed	
48	erican Medical Association* //Jama.Ama-Assn.Org/	0.00	0.44	0.07	0.48	B	AMA	AMA	.	2.0	4189	460	0.11	82700	21.455	6.048	6.3
4	avioural Health Services Res //Www.Fmh.Usf.Edu/Jbhsr/Jbhsrmain.Html	0.00	0.00	0.90	0.10	B	Chic	Chic	2.5	6.0	150	36	0.24	240	1.369	0.367	3.4
4	ical Child Adol Psychology v.Jccap.Net/Home.Htm	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	M	APA	APA	3.0	5.0	149	52	0.35	70	1.040	0.300	n/a
24	at Of Infectious Diseases*+ journals.uchicago.edu/JID/home.html	0.27	0.27	0.00	0.44	B	AMA	AMA	7.7	6.0	675	540	0.80	30971	4.481	0.889	6.6
4	al Of Psychoactive Drugs v.Hafci.Org/Journal/	0.10	0.25	0.25	0.40	M	Chic	Chic	2.0	6.0	112	48	0.43	753	0.846	0.033	8.1
12	at Of Psychosomatic Res	0.00	0.30	0.60	0.10	B	AMA	AMA	7.0	.	293	100	0.34	4048	2.019	0.250	8.1

Email, contact info	Percent of Content					Logistics			Selectivity			Impact					
	Iss	Basic science	Int-M	Int-B	Epi	Submit	Cite format	Ref format	Rev lag	Pub lag	Annual manuscripts received	Annual articles pub	Accept rate	2003 Total cited	2003 Impact factor	2003 Immed factor	Cited half-life
http://www.ingenta.com/Journals/Browse/ELs/00223999	4	0.00	0.00	0.90	0.10	B	APA	APA	4.0	9.0	53	24	0.45	189	0.214	0.000	8.0
http://www.nationalrehab.org/website/index.html	6	0.10	0.75	0.10	0.05	B	Van	Van	7.0	6.0	138	45	0.33	102	1.068	0.081	2.2
http://www.Tandf.co.Uk/Journals/Titles/16501977.Asp	8	0.20	0.60	0.20	0.00	B	AMA	Van	1.5	4.0	78	62	0.79	621	0.707	0.045	6.2
http://www.Vard.Org/Jour/Jourindx.Htm	4	0.70	0.00	0.10	0.10	M	APA	APA	3.5	4.0	101	54	0.53	824	0.764	0.054	8.9
http://www.Science.Org/Publications/Index.Php?category_Id = 439	6	0.20	0.00	0.40	0.40	M	own	own	1.5	6.0	212	95	0.45	3786	2.104	0.131	8.3
http://www.Rci.Rutgers.Edu/~Cas2/Journal/	8	0.02	0.28	0.60	0.10	B	APA	APA	2.0	10.0	210	96	0.46	1427	1.468	0.229	6.2
http://www.Elsevier.Com/JournalDetail.Html?Pubid = /75& Precis = &Popu	4	0.05	0.10	0.10	0.60	B	AMA	AMA	2.0	4.0	100	50	0.50	305	1.286	0.189	2.9
http://Urban.Oupjournals.Org/	4	0.00	0.00	0.42	0.58	E	AMA	AMA	n/a	n/a	n/a	31	n/a	1362	1.130	0.161	5.5
http://Ees.Elsevier.Com/Pe	12	0.00	0.30	0.10	0.10	E	AMA	own	4.5	4.5	450	250	0.56	2665	2.274	3.364	4.5
http://Epi.Manuscriptcentral.Com	10	0.10	0.10	0.10	0.70	B	Harv	Harv	3.0	4.0	600	200	0.33	8130	3.133	0.634	7.8
http://Titles.Cambridge.Org/Journals/Journal_-logue.Asp?Historylinks=ALPHA&Mnemonic =	6	0.00	0.00	0.10	0.90	E	Own	Own	2.0	10.0	306	96	0.31	5550	3.687	0.581	8.1
http://Psymed.Editorialmanager.Com	6	0.00	0.30	0.30	0.10	M	Van	Van	4.0	5.0	293	44	0.15	1462	3.949	0.707	6.6
http://Content.Karger.Com/Produkteb/Produkte.Asp?on=Journalhome&Produktnr = 223864	4	0.00	0.00	0.35	0.05	M	APA	APA	3.0	15.0	63	26	0.41	388	0.923	0.057	7.9
http://www.Apa.Org/Journals/Rep.Html	12	0.05	0.00	0.95	0.00	E	AMA	AMA	2.0	2.0	288	130	0.45	2620	2.243	0.535	4.9
http://Std.Edmgr.Com	6	0.00	0.30	0.10	0.60	B	AMA	Van	2.0	6.0	244	122	0.50	1093	1.732	0.406	3.6
http://sti.bmjournals.com/	10	0.13	0.20	0.39	0.23				3.4	5.9	832	175	0.39	7757.17	2.98	0.74	6.50

Int-M = Medical interventions, Int-B = Behavioural interventions, Epi = Epidemiological, correlational, or observational studies, Submit = Methods to submit a manuscript, Rev Lag = Review lag, time between author's submission and editorial decision, Pub Lag = Publication lag, time between acceptance and actual publication, Total Cited: Number of citations of all papers, + Authors are charged for publication

Editors’ estimates of proportion of journal content in 4 areas published in 50 journals that publish HIV/AIDS behavioural reports

Table 2

Field	Number of journals	Behavioural interventions Average%, range	Epi/corr/observational Average%, range	Medical interventions Average%, range	Basic science Average%, range
HIV/AIDS	10	33.6 (0–100)	13.5 (0–44)	23 (0–60)	19.8 (0–68)
Psych	13	48.8 (10–100)	21.9 (0–90)	11.9 (0–30)	10.8 (0–45)
Pub. health/ pre- vention	6	58.3 (20–90)	35 (5–80)	0	6 (0–25)
Substance abuse	7	38.6 (25–60)	30 (10–50)	19.7 (0–30)	14.6 (2–25)
Sex/STD	5	26.4 (2–95)	18.6 (0–60)	19 (0–60)	34 (0–70)
Medicine	5	6 (0–10)	33.4 (20–48)	37.2 (27–60)	7.4 (0–27)
Rehabilitation	4	38.8 (10–90)	5 (0–10)	33.8 (0–75)	7.5 (0–20)