Letters to the Editor

Fewer orphans than previously thought?
From ALLEN WILCOX

The editors of IJE have commented on the surprising number of papers in their journal and other journals that fail to be cited even once. According to their most recent calculations, 17% of papers in IJE and 40% of those in Epidemiology achieve no recognition in the scientific literature.1 These numbers do not seem very plausible, so I decided to check. Using the most recent data available from my publisher, I tracked the citations of research papers published in Epidemiology in 2008. During just these couple of years of follow-up, 96% of our papers had been cited. Being the optimist, I cannot help but trust that the remaining orphans (including one lonely paper from my own research group) will eventually win recognition.

This leaves me puzzled as to where the IJE editors got their numbers. Can they recalculate?

Reference


Editor’s Response
From SHAH EBRAHIM

I am grateful to Dr Allen Wilcox for drawing my attention to an error in the proportions of papers receiving zero citations, that were published by Epidemiology and International Journal of Epidemiology in the IEA newsletter. These data were originally included in an IEA council report written in mid-2009 and were obtained from Web of Science and related to papers published in 2007 and cited up to the end of 2008. These analyses included original articles, editorial material and reviews. International Journal of Epidemiology and Epidemiology had similar levels of zero publication—23% of 243 papers and 20% of 129 papers, respectively—and not 17 and 40% as stated in the newsletter.

As penance for my transcription errors, I have updated the analyses for articles published in 2008, attempting to include only research papers. Gratifyingly, only 2 of 134 papers published in Epidemiology in 2008, selected using the ‘article’ filter, had not been cited to date. For International Journal of Epidemiology using the same criteria, all the 130 papers had been cited at least once.

Sincere apologies to Dr Wilcox and Epidemiology—I can only blame too little time coupled with a serious bias towards International Journal of Epidemiology.

Festina lente!

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