



It Is Time to Stop Racial Exclusion in Scholarly Citations

Afsaneh Shirani 

Received: 23 April 2021 / Accepted: 5 July 2021 / Published online: 21 October 2021
© Journal of Bioethical Inquiry Pty Ltd. 2021

Keywords Racism · Scholarly citations · Publications

I read with interest the paper by Elias and Paradies on ethical implications of racism and various costs associated with racism occurring at the institutional level (Elias and Paradies 2021). The authors should be commended on their timely and insightful article. My comments are focused on a less visible form of racism involving racial exclusion of scholarly citations in academic publications based on my personal experience.

I recently reviewed a manuscript for an international medical journal. A while later, the journal's editor sent out an email to inform me of the final decision on the manuscript. The email also included anonymous comments from the other reviewer. I read those comments with interest. After all, you would like to know how your peers may scientifically appraise the same manuscript! I was however very surprised when I came to the following comment “... in the [XXX] section—why that specific Iranian study if there are so many [XXX] study examples ... ?” I took a pause! I could not understand what was wrong

with citing a study from Iran when giving a relevant study example. I started to wonder if the reviewer would have raised the same comment if a study had been cited from other countries. I also began to ponder how an author, who has been asked to provide “justification” for citing an “Iranian study,” would feel the next time s/he might need to cite a paper from Iran. I wrote back to the journal's editor and raised my concerns. He stated that he fully agreed with me and he apologized for overlooking the comment. He also suggested anonymously forwarding my concerns to the corresponding reviewer—a suggestion I completely supported. Most recently, I found out that the manuscript was published in another medical journal, with all the sentences citing the Iranian study totally removed!

It is so sad to see evidence of racial exclusion in scholarly citations in a so-called era of “Science without Borders!” (Hodson 2018). It is the responsibility of the scientific publishing community to strive even more than before to stay away from any form of racial bias and discrimination including when it comes to citation of scholarly articles (Niriella et al. 2020). Eliminating racial disparities in medicine and health-care would not be fully possible without addressing racism in scientific publications and citations.

A. Shirani (✉)
Department of Neurological Sciences, University
of Nebraska Medical Center, 988440 Nebraska Medical
Center, Omaha, NE 68198-8440, USA
e-mail: afsaneh.shirani@unmc.edu

Funding This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

References

- Elias, A. , and Y. Paradies. 2021. The costs of institutional racism and its ethical implications for healthcare. *Journal of Bioethical Inquiry* 18(1): 45–48.
- Hodson, R. 2018. Science without borders. *Nature* 562(7727): S57.
- Niriella, M.A., A.P. De Silva, H.J. de Silva, and S. Jayasinghe. 2020. Is there racism in academic medical publishing? *BMJ Evidence Based Medicine* <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjebm-2020-111487>.

Publisher's Note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.