

23 September 2020

## **BRIEF19**

*A daily review of covid-19 research and policy.*

### **RESEARCH BRIEFING**

#### **Covid-19 magnifies yet another inequality; gender in academic publication authorship.**

Anyone having to wade through the monumental amount of research that has been released since the start of the covid-19 pandemic may have overlooked one key metric: the gender of the corresponding (or leading) author of scientific studies. The pandemic has had an effect on the productivity of many academic physicians, due to increased clinical workloads combined with childcare and related family issues.

In many homes, the burden of childcare has fallen on the women academics. Released last week in [JAMA Network Open](#), a research letter compared the proportion of women and men corresponding authors among preprinted research (such as on medRxiv and bioRxiv and other non-peer review websites that academic physicians and other researchers increasingly use to get information to the public sooner than possible under the traditional peer-review route). The researchers looked at corresponding author gender before and during the covid-19 pandemic by reviewing material uploaded to medRxiv and bioRxiv, the two main preprint depositories for health and life sciences.

The researchers were able to determine corresponding author gender of just under 50,000 articles (97 percent). A statistically significant increase in the existing gender gap was seen over time with uploads to medRxiv, but not bioRxiv. During the pandemic the lead author gap increased from 23 percent more men than women in January 2020 to 55 percent by April 2020. Comparatively the gap only increased from 46 percent to 47 percent in bioRxiv. The medRxiv gap increase was too large to be attributed to seasonal variation (various times during the school calendar year may have a disproportionate effect on each gender at baseline). The authors also took United States and non-US based location of origin into consideration.

A [commentary](#) released in *JAMA Network Open* that accompanies this research letter further discusses the pandemic and its detrimental effect on the academic woman in the medical and biological science fields in particular. It notes not only the above reported decline but also a 19 percent drop of women as lead authors in covid-19-related research manuscripts. The authors point out the prominent and perhaps neglected concern that the immediate and longterm effects covid-19 might have on the careers of active scholars. If “publish or perish” is the motto of academia, the covid-19 pandemic has introduced another hurdle for women. Acknowledging that and modifying promotion standards is warranted.

—*Christopher Sampson, MD, FACEP*

## **POLICY BRIEFING**

### **New GAO recommendations to confront the pandemic.**

The Government Accountability Office (GAO) [released](#) a new report outlining the state of the National Health Emergency, acknowledging the efforts of various agencies thus far, and providing new recommendations with the knowledge that many of these same agencies will face additional strain from the coming influenza and hurricane seasons.

- **Medical Supply Chain:** The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), in coordination with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) take on a more central role in supply chain logistics, work with stakeholders to mitigate potential shortages, and develop a better system to track requests and fulfillment processing.
- **Vaccines and Therapeutics:** HHS should work with the Department of Defense (DOD) to develop and publish a national plan and specific timeline for vaccine deployment and administration.
- **Data:** the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) needs to work with stakeholders to ensure completeness of demographic data and ensure its ability to assess long-term health outcomes. The CDC needs to develop a strategy to more fully capture nursing home data retroactive to January 1, 2020.
- **Economic Impact Payments:** the Department of the Treasury and the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) update and refine the process of identifying eligible recipients who have not received economic impact payments (EIPs) and work to better target and communicate with them.
- **Coronavirus Relief Fund:** The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) should work with the Department of Treasury to publish audit guidance regarding the Coronavirus Relief Fund.
- **Guidance for K-12 Schools:** CDC must publish cogent, clear, and internally-consistent guidance relating to school opening status.
- **Tracking Contract Obligations:** the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and DOD must enhance visibility on contract actions related to disaster relief efforts.
- **Cybersecurity:** HHS should expedite implementation of GAO's [prior](#) recommendations regarding intra-agency weaknesses.

*The Government Accountability Office.*

*—Joshua Lesko, MD*

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*Brief19 is a daily executive summary of covid-19-related medical research, news, and public policy. It was founded and created by frontline emergency medicine physicians with expertise in medical research critique, health and public policy.*