Peer review in Croatian Open Access scholarly and professional journals: a cross-disciplinary survey

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Objective

The peer-review process in Croatian OA journals was investigated in order to identify journal practices.

Materials and methods

Online questionnaire was sent by email to journal editors from the Hrčak repository of Croatian OA journals. We collected the data on discipline, acceptance rate, peer review type, guidelines for peer reviewers, number of reviewers in the editorial systems, duration of peer review process, ethical issues, and editorial freedom and integrity. The data was collected during February 2017.

Results

Acceptance rate

Average number of submitted manuscripts per year is 31 for SSH and 103 for STM. In average, 10 manuscripts per year are rejected on the editorial level for SSH and 43 for STM. Journals from the fields of SSH publish 14 papers per year (acceptance rate 45%) and from the fields of STM 36 papers (acceptance rate 39%) (Chart 1).

Peer reviewers

There is significant difference in the type of peer review. 87% SSH journals employ double blind peer review, comparing with 47% in STM journals. Instructions for peer reviewers are provided by 31% STM and 41% SSH journals. Other journals provide only structured forms for the reviewers. Less than half of the journals includes ethical issues like plagiarism, expression of concern or confidentiality in the instructions for reviewers (Chart 2). Editors are in general very satisfied with the quality of the submitted reviews (Chart 3). It takes in average 80 days to make decision about the acceptance of manuscript and another 62 days to publish the accepted paper. 86% of the STM and 86% of the SSH editors believe they have editorial freedom and integrity, and 11% and 14% respectively believe they do not.

Open peer review

None of the included journal employ open peer review. We define open peer review as a process where peer review reports are publicly available, but peer reviewers can choose to remain anonymous. The survey shows that editors are not familiar with the concept of open peer review. They do not believe that open peer review would be beneficial, but significant portion do believe that open peer review can contribute to the reputation of the reviewers (Chart 6).

Conclusions

Peer review in Croatian OA journals lacks transparency and globally accepted standards. Majority of journals use double blind peer review and have the high level of editorial freedom and integrity. According to editors of Croatian OA journals, reviews are of a high quality. Small number of journals ask their reviewers to declare conflict of interest. There is a need to raise awareness of the importance of the transparent guidelines for the reviewers and it is also important to educate editors on some concepts of the editorial processes, including ethical issues.