

Editorial transparency and peer review fairness in Indian Psychiatric Publishing

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Dear Editor,

I wish to address concerns, perceived and reported by early- and mid-career psychiatrists, regarding patronage-driven publication patterns within segments of Indian psychiatric publishing.

Scientific publishing is predicated on epistemic neutrality. However, in tightly networked academic systems, hierarchical influence can meaningfully distort outcomes. In several Indian psychiatric journals, a perceived disproportionate concentration of publications appears linked to specific senior academicians, institutional clusters, and recurring collaborative networks. While such clustering may partly reflect productivity or infrastructure advantages, its scale raises questions about editorial independence and reviewer impartiality.

Early- and mid-career psychiatrists report that manuscripts lacking endorsement by well-known figures often face desk rejection, superficial methodological critique, and opaque decision-making. In contrast, submissions from influential academics proceed with greater procedural ease. Even implicitly, name-recognition bias is a well-documented phenomenon in peer review literature. Although peer review protocols, conflict-of-interest declarations, and editorial recusal guidelines promote objective evaluation, their implementation may be undermined by subtle, pervasive biases, eroding meritocratic ideals. Without insulation from such bias, review systems lose credibility.

The issue extends beyond individual fairness. Patronage ecosystems narrow intellectual diversity, reinforce institutional hegemony, and disincentivize methodological dissent. Over time, this fosters citation cartels, editorial board homogeneity, and epistemic stagnation. In emerging research cultures, where advancement is tied to publication metrics, structural favoritism has tangible career consequences.

It is important to emphasize that nepotism in academic contexts rarely manifests as overt rule-breaking. It operates through informal recommendation networks, editorial familiarity, reciprocal reviewing, and institutional prestige effects. Without rigorous safeguards, these dynamics can systematically privilege proximity to power over scientific merit.

Concrete corrective measures would include:

1. Mandatory double-blind review with verified anonymization.
2. Transparent reporting of editorial decision timelines and acceptance stratified by institutional type.
3. Rotation limits for editorial board members and reviewers.
4. Public declaration of reviewer–author conflicts beyond financial disclosures, including mentorship and institutional ties.
5. Independent oversight mechanisms for handling complaints regarding editorial bias.

The reluctance of domestic journals to publish critical introspection on their own governance structures further underscores the need for discussion in neutral international forums. Academic integrity cannot rely solely on reputational assurances; it requires structural transparency.

Scientific advancement depends not only on generating knowledge but on ensuring equitable pathways for its dissemination. Where gatekeeping becomes intertwined with hierarchy, reform becomes an ethical imperative.

Sincerely,

Dr Aayush Rana

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