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Original Article

Publishers' and editors' perceptions of equity, diversity, and inclusion: A cross-sectional study of European Association of Science Editors' community

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Data availability statement

De-identified data supporting this study's findings are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Author contributions

Conceptualization and Methodology – S.M.P., A.H., C.T., P.O., K.W., D.S.; Methodology, Resources, Visualization, and Writing – Review and Editing – S.M.P., A.H., C.T., P.O., K.W., D.S., C.K.; Data curation and Formal analysis – S.M.P, A.H., C.T., P.O., K.W., D.S.; Writing and Original draft preparation – S.M.P., A.H., C.T.; Project administration – S.M.P., A.H., C.T., P.O., K.W., D.S., C.K.; Supervision – A.H.

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Declaration of Interests

Charikleia Tzanakou directs the Centre for Diversity Policy Research and Practice at Oxford Brookes University. Kate Wilson is an employee of Elsevier. Diana Samuel is the Acting Deputy Editor of *The Lancet Digital Health*. Christina Kassiteridi is an employee of the Royal College of Physicians.

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Abstract

Background: Scholarly settings lack racial, ethnic, sex, gender, geographic, and linguistic diversity. Despite initiatives to promote more inclusive scholarly communities, the extent of implementation of policies related to equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) remains low.

Objectives: The objective is to survey the perceptions and opinions of journal editors and other stakeholders with reference to policies related to EDI and relevant practices in their journals and organizations.

Methods: We sent out, through email, a link to a survey with 16 Likert-scale items and 8 open-ended questions in English to assess the perceptions of EDI. Questions were generated based on discussions at meetings of the European Association of Science Editors (EASE) EDI Committee in November and December 2023. The survey was available from 8 to 30 January 2024. Snowball sampling was used among members of EASE and those of related professional organizations recruited through social networks.

Results: Of the total of 232 participants, 129/232 (56%) responded on behalf of journals and 103/232 (44%) on behalf of organizations. Most (72%) considered EDI to be important or very important for their journal or organization, and even more (76%) wanted examples of existing policies and guidelines for implementing EDI. Exactly 50% (27/54) reported that their organizations have no published EDI policies, and 59% (54/91) reported the absence of an EDI statement.

Conclusion: Although the survey showed wide support for EDI within journals and organizations, efforts to develop EDI policies and statements have been limited, as reflected in the responses that welcomed guidance on EDI. This suggests a need for increased awareness and knowledge-sharing about EDI policies and practices, as well as concrete actions to create a more diverse scholarly community.

Keywords:

Coalition for Diversity and Inclusion in Scholarly Communications, equity, diversity, and inclusion in scholarly publishing, perceptions of equity, diversity, and inclusion, promoting equity, diversity, and inclusion, Sex and Gender Equity in Research guidelines

Introduction

The world was reminded of the systemic injustices and racism prevalent in society towards underserved and minoritized racial and ethnic communities in 2020 in the wake of the effects of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic and police brutality.[1-5] Different sectors of society, including editors, reviewers, researchers, funders, and academic institutions, have embarked on promoting more inclusive and diverse workforces and partnerships in an effort to challenge established practices that have led to racial, ethnic, sex, gender, and geographic and linguistic inequalities.[6,7] Publishers and scientific journals have also taken an introspective look at the inclusivity of their policies, practices, and leadership.[8-13] Initiatives to encourage diverse workforces across the scientific and scholarly landscape include the Coalition for Diversity & Inclusion in Scholarly Communications (C4DISC) and Sex and Gender Equity in Research guidelines (SAGER).[14-16] The coalition, founded in 2017 by 10 trade and professional associations that represented organizations and individuals working in scholarly communications, values and produces guidelines on accessibility, diversity, and equitable and inclusive practices within the scholarly communications ecosystem whereas the SAGER guidelines, published in 2016, incorporate a comprehensive procedure for reporting sex and gender information in study design, data analyses, results, and their interpretations. These guidelines were created because sex and gender differences are often overlooked in research design, study implementation, and scientific reporting, as well as in general science communication, and this oversight, or omission, limits the generalizability of research findings and their applicability to clinical practice, particularly not only for women but also for men. For over 6 years, C4DISC and the SAGER guidelines have promoted sex, gender, race, and ethnic inclusivity through various engagement and dissemination activities. However, despite such initiatives, studies still show that women and Asian, Black, Latinx, and Indigenous communities are underrepresented in scholarly networks,[17-21] a striking instance being the order, on 31 January 2025, to scientists at the US Centers for Disease Control to withdraw studies that use terms such as 'LGBT' or 'pregnant people', violating the language guidelines used by major scientific publishers.[22]

In 2021, *JAMA Internal Medicine* published results from a survey completed by editors at top medical journals.[17] The findings were not surprising: editors-in-chief, deputy editors, and associate editors of the journals were predominantly White men, with only a few self-reporting their race as Asian, Black, or having a Latinx ethnicity. Another study found a similar low prevalence of racially and ethnically diverse editors and editorial board members in psychiatry and neuroscience journals.[18] Women editors-in-chief were found to be underrepresented in the top 10 medical journals across specialties.[19] A study published in 2023 used machine learning to predict the gender of scientific editors of more than a thousand academic journals and found that of the few (26%) women in the data set, only 14% were editors and fewer still – only 8% – were editors-in-chief.[23] Organizations, journals, and publishers increasingly acknowledge that diverse perspectives and viewpoints enrich how we approach science owing to the contribution of different lived experiences and levels of expertise.[8-13] However, adopting or implementing policies to increase diversity and inclusion in scholarly publishing has its own challenges including difficulties in recruiting underrepresented individuals from minoritized groups and in removing barriers to improve engagement.[24]

Given the lack of sex, gender, racial, ethnic, geographical, and linguistic diversity in academic publishing and in an attempt to bring awareness to the importance of such diversity, the European Association of Scientific Editors (EASE) has launched several initiatives, including the creation of a committee, namely the equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) Committee (ease.org.uk/communities/special-interest-committees/equity-diversity-and-inclusion-committee/). The members of the committee are professionally and geographically diverse and strive to develop action plans and practical resources to guide research stakeholders to recognize and implement policies to promote EDI. With the overarching goal of reducing bias, which has led to inequality in research communities, the committee engages with researchers, peer reviewers, editors, publishers, and many other stakeholders. In 2024, following the release of C4DISC and SAGER guidelines, the committee developed a survey aimed at publishing and scientific communities to raise their awareness of EDI. The survey sought to collect data on the perceptions and opinions of journal editors and other stakeholders with reference to policies and practices related to EDI in their journals or organizations.

Methods

The survey prepared by the EASE EDI Committee comprised 16 Likert-scale and multiple-choice questions and 8 open-ended questions (Supplementary File 1) written in English and generated based on discussions at meetings of the Committee held in November and December 2023. The survey included questions about occupational characteristics of respondents, their perceptions of policies related to EDI, and adoption of EDI policies by their journals or organizations. We did not collect sociodemographic data from the respondents. Respondents were able to indicate whether they were answering as freelance editors or on behalf of their journals or their organizations, which included universities, research centres, societies, publishers, and government agencies. The survey was available online on SurveyMonkey from 8 to 30 January 2024. The link to the survey was sent to active EASE members and EASE community from a list of active members and posted on the official social media sites of EASE. The members were also encouraged to share the link, through their social media and other networks, with members of relevant professional organizations. A blog describing the purpose of the survey was posted on the EASE website, followed by a series of emails to existing networks to facilitate snowball sampling to recruit more respondents. We described the responses as frequencies and percentages and followed the STROBE guidelines (Strengthening the Reporting of Observational Studies in Epidemiology) for the reporting of this cross-sectional study (Supplementary File 2).[25]

Ethics

As this was an EASE survey and EASE does not have an IRB, we followed the ethical principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration for this study.[26] Participants confirmed their informed consent by agreeing to participate in the survey. Only the authors of this study had access to contact information of those participants who agreed to elaborate on their responses.

Results

Characteristics of respondents

Of the total of 232 participants, 129 (56%) responded on behalf of their journals and 103 (44%) on behalf of their organizations (Figure 1). More than half (56%) of the respondents reported having more than 10 years of professional experience (Figure 2),

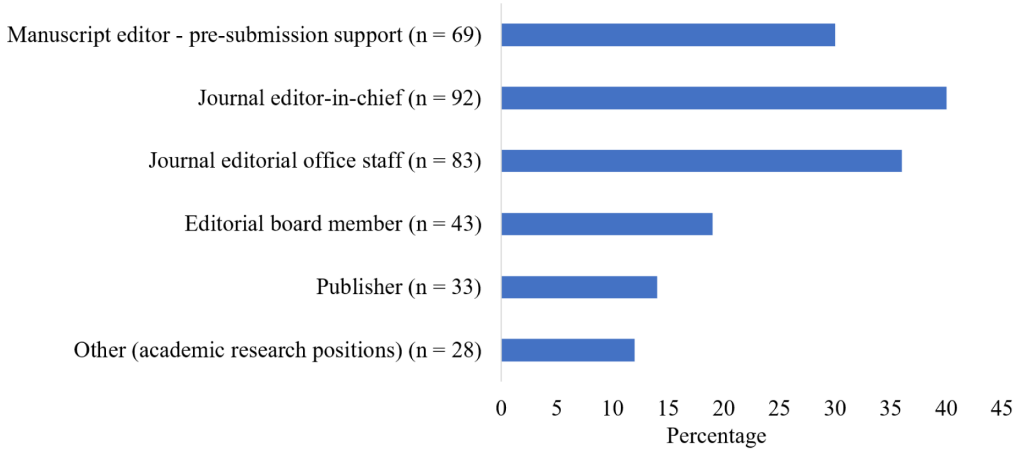

Figure 1. Professional roles of survey participants.

and 40% of them held such positions as editor-in-chief, deputy editor, scientific editor, section editor, or equivalent.

Perceptions of policies related to equity, diversity, and inclusion

A total of 111 participants responded to the question on the importance of EDI policies. Most (72%) considered EDI policies to be important or very important for their journal or organization (Table 1). A total of 70 (70%) respondents felt confident discussing EDI issues with colleagues or stakeholders. A total of 84 out of 111 (76%) respondents thought that access to existing policy statements and guidelines would provide additional support to increasing awareness of EDI and improving the relevant policies or activities (Figure 3).

Adoption of policies and practices related to equity, diversity, and inclusion

A total of 54 participants responded to the question about whether their organization's support of EDI was evident from public commitments or membership of relevant publishing initiatives. Half of the 54 respondents reported that their organization had not published any EDI policies; 20 respondents (37%) reported that they had; and 7 were unsure.

Many participants (54/91, or 59%) reported that their journal does not have an EDI policy statement in place; by 26 (29%) reported that it does; and 11 (12%) were unsure.

Exactly 50% (27/54) reported that their organization had not joined C4DISC; nearly a third (15/54, or 28%), reported that it had; and the remainder (12/54, or 22%) were unsure.

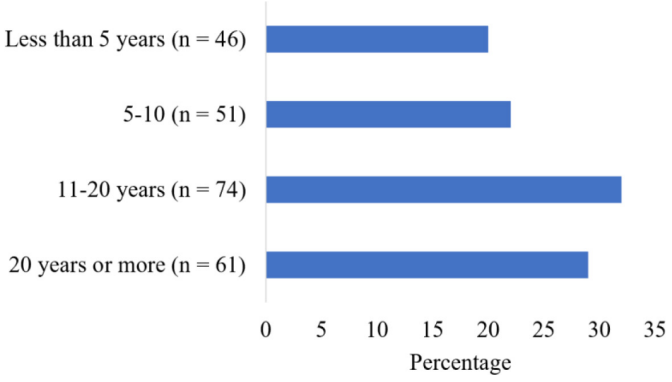

Figure 2. Length of professional experience in academic publishing of survey participants.

Table 1. Respondents' (N = 111) perceptions of the importance of policies related to equity, diversity, and inclusion and basic data on contributing authors (collected by journals) or members (collected by organizations)

	Responses	
Perceived importance of EDI	n	%
Very important	54	49
Important	25	23
We consider it	19	17
Not very important at all	7	6
Not sure	6	5
Data collected on	n	%
Age	16	14
Career stage	2	2
Gender	41	37
Geographic location	54	49
Institutional affiliation	1	1
Occupation and income	39	35
Professional role	32	29
Race/ethnicity	26	23
Unspecified or other information	2	2
None of the above	43	39

EDI, equity, diversity, and inclusion

Regarding SAGER guidelines, 43% of the organizations and 36% of the journals reported that they had embraced the guidelines' principles but had not actually endorsed or adopted the guidelines formally (Table 2). Over a third (33/91, or 36%) of the journals likewise reported embracing SAGER guidelines but had not endorsed or adopted them formally (Table 2). Similar to the organizations who had joined C4DISC, a quarter of the respondents (23/91, or 25%) representing their journals were not a part of the SAGER initiative.

Data on sociodemographic aspects such as geographical location and race or ethnicity from the organizations and the journals were disparate, the location being the most frequently given item of information (Table 1). Nearly 40% of the journals and organizations (43/111) collected no sociodemographic information at all about their authors or members.

A total of 111 respondents answered the question of whether their journal or organization had anyone specifically responsible for EDI. Half of the journals or organizations had none; 35 (32%) had one staff member; 11 (10%) answered that the question was not applicable; and 9 (8%) were unsure. Of the journals or organizations that did have someone responsible for EDI, nearly all (32/35, or 91%) reported that their EDI representatives do not serve on any external EDI boards or participate in other EDI initiatives. The remaining respondents reported that they have an EDI representative serving elsewhere (37%). The majority (66/111, or 59%) responded with uncertainty or indicated that the question did not apply to their journal or organization. Similarly, 72 out of 111 (65%) respondents

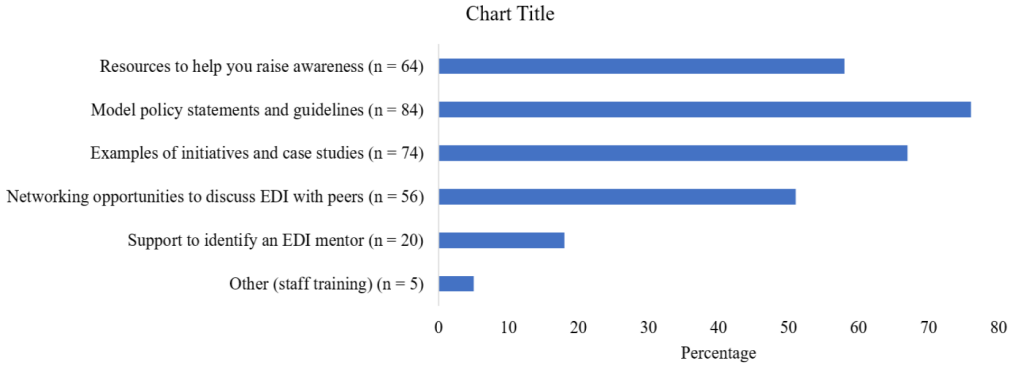

Figure 3. Additional support requested by participants representing journals or organizations toward improving awareness of, and policies and or activities to promote EDI (equity, diversity, and inclusion).

Table 2. Use of Sex and Gender Equity in Research guidelines by organizations or journals as reported by respondents

	Response			
	Organizations (n = 54)		Journals (n = 91)	
Is your organization or journal aware of SAGER guidelines?	n	%	n	%
Yes, we have endorsed them on EASE website.	5	9	7	8
Yes, we mention them in our instructions to authors.	8	15	17	19
We embrace the principles, but have neither endorsed them nor adopted them formally.	23	43	33	36
No.	8	15	23	25
Not sure	12	22	15	16

reported that their journal or organization did not have any staff specifically responsible for EDI, and 20 respondents (18%) indicated that they did not know.

Many respondents did not answer some survey questions related to the adoption of EDI policies and practices, as evident in the low number of responses. It is not entirely clear why this was the case. It is possible that the respondents did not know more or felt uncomfortable responding on behalf of their organization, despite having 'not sure' as one of the possible answers.

Discussion

In a cross-sectional survey, respondents from various professional backgrounds in publishing reported that EDI is important and that policies, initiatives, and resources are needed to improve EDI in journals and organizations. In trying to increase diversity in editorial and publishing staff and leadership, it is encouraging that these stakeholders perceived policies and problems related to EDI as important, and that the majority felt confident in discussing them internally. However, to move forward with solutions, most respondents believed that more resources in the form of model policy statements and guidelines would improve EDI and increase awareness of the importance of EDI in their journals and organizations.

In a survey conducted by Wiley in 2020, most (61%) respondents who did not belong to any particular academic society expressed interest in joining one that already provided leadership in promoting policies related to EDI. Additionally, three-quarters (75%) of respondents believed that societies should drive EDI activities and 68% thought that both societies and publishers should work in tandem towards achieving EDI.[24] This finding is corroborated by our respondents who reported that they needed model policies and adequate guidance, which would probably come from organizations already providing leadership in EDI.

The results from the C4DISC Equity Workplace Survey add important context to the present study.[27] The survey found that not everyone experiences tangible improvements in workplace culture and efforts at workplace equity. Whereas 89% of the respondents reported in 2023 that their employer had stated its values about diversity (an increase of 29 percentage points compared to 2018), not all employees experienced inclusive or supportive work environments.[28] Respondents from historically marginalized groups tended to experience less positive workplace culture compared to that experienced by most of the respondents. Perceptions of equal promotion opportunities vary by gender identity, sexual orientation, racial and ethnic groups, and demographic groups, suggesting that

inequities persist. Key focus areas for improving equity include mentorship and networking opportunities, promotion structures and processes, and support for employees returning to work after career breaks. Inequities persist across the career life cycle, and action is needed to remove barriers to career progression, build equitable structures, and honour diversity. Accordingly, the future of workplace equity requires organizational and personal accountability.

Clearly, the stakeholders in our sample recognized and accepted that changes are indeed important and it is necessary to increase EDI in their circles. However, due to the unique structures of academic and scientific circles across different disciplines, interventions to improve the racial, ethnic, sex, gender, and geographical representation in editorial and publishing staff would require context-specific approaches.[6,7] Although the percentage of publishers who responded to the survey in the current study was only 14%, based on the earlier findings from the Wiley survey and from the present study, publishers could be influential leaders in encouraging racial, ethnic, gender, origin, and geographical representation in academic societies across diverse disciplines. Elsevier, one of the world's largest publishers, has recognized and initiated renewed policies to combat systemic barriers through training, webinars, and provision of resources to lead other organizations in similar directions.[29] Additionally, Elsevier has introduced the SAGER guidelines into the instructions to authors for thousands of journals.

In response to historic racial and ethnic under-representation in geoscience, a group of authors created a six-part action plan in an effort to counter racist and discriminatory practices in that field. Ali and colleagues called on the leadership of geoscience societies to adhere to the plan to influence representative hiring, promotion, and leadership of racially and ethnically diverse individuals.[30] The Royal Society of Chemistry (UK) similarly set forth approaches to improve EDI in academia, which have since then been expanded by researchers at the Bruyere Research Institute at the University of Ottawa, Canada, for the wider academic community. Further, to ensure a more diverse and inclusive scholarly environment, the Royal Society of Chemistry launched the joint commitment for action on inclusion and diversity in publishing in June 2020.[6,7,30]

EASE has the opportunity to engage publishers, societies, and journals that have established EDI policies to be exemplary leaders to guide other organizations. European Association of Scientific Editors accordingly has adopted the University of Ottawa's modified EDI checklist to provide guidance for its members and has a resources page.[31] Accordingly, EASE established the EDI Committee in 2021, before the Gender Diversity Committee was disbanded in 2022. Future efforts by EASE in conjunction with stakeholders willing to engage in leadership towards improving EDI will be essential for the representation of sex, gender, racial, ethnic, geographical, and linguistic diversity in academia. Policies that encourage inclusive practices in academic circles may be insufficient to effect change in some contexts; thus, an understanding of such policies that have proven to be successful would serve as a starting point. Transparent and regular reporting of outcomes following the implementation of these policies is also crucial. It is essential to recognize the intersectionality of race, ethnicity, and gender in scholarly discussions concerning EDI. Focusing only on how individual characteristics or society-imposed identities affect individuals is insufficient to understand the complex dynamics of how systemic inequalities work.[32] Future studies

should recognize these dynamics and the interplay of other factors when providing educational resources or implementing other interventions to increase awareness of EDI and promote initiatives related to EDI.[33]

Limitations

We were unable to calculate the response rate due to the snowball sampling method, which means that the total number of individuals who received the invitation for the survey remains unknown. Additionally, we did not collect data on the sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents, which is a significant weakness of this study. This information was not recorded because of the need to preserve the anonymity of respondents. The respondents may also have provided socially desirable responses about EDI; however, this is unlikely, given the relationship and outreach EASE has with the scientific community and the fact that the survey was anonymized. Lastly, it was not compulsory to complete all of the survey items; as a result, up to 178 (77%) of the respondents did not answer the questions related to the adoption of EDI practices and their perception of EDI – our view of the perceptions of the respondents is therefore incomplete.

Conclusion

Most respondents represented journals and, despite not having implemented any policies related to EDI, the majority reported their willingness to do so using existing resources. Stakeholder cooperation is essential to change the inequitable practices that have led to under-representation in the scientific community of racially, ethnically, and geographically diverse individuals, as well as those representing diverse genders and origins. Future work to assess the changing levels of knowledge of DEI resources and increased implementation of DEI policies is needed. European Association of Scientific Editors, especially its EDI Committee, could work alongside experienced publishers to increase journals' and organizations' awareness of and exposure to EDI policies and initiatives to strive towards this important goal.

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