

Open Access publication of Public Health research in African journals

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Associated with a relative lack of research capacity in the Global South is lack of research with local relevance to populations in the South. This is compounded by difficulty in publishing high quality research in an open access format so that it is readily available and the results can be applied where they are needed. Recent data indicate that Open Access papers have drastically fewer lead authors from low-income regions and that Article Processing Charges are a barrier to Open Access publication for scientists from the Global South.

PublicHealth.Africa has been established to leverage the strengths of African alumni from international and local online and face-to-face Master of Public Health courses. In a survey of members of African public health graduates, more than a half of the respondents reported barriers to research and writing. Some participants were asked if they would like to publish their research as open access, and more than 70% said yes, if the journal waived or did not levy publication fees, but only a half said yes if their institution had to pay and only a quarter if they had to pay the fees themselves.

PublicHealth.Africa, in association with LIBSENSE, has thus embarked on a series of studies to explore research journals published in Africa that might be expected to publish articles on public health. The first study in this series, preliminary data reported here, is to identify these journals and their characteristics according to various categories of Open Access.

Investigators including alumni from public health courses and librarians examined data from 11 African countries. The number of journals that might be expected to publish public health articles varied from 1 to 53 in each country, with another 57 journals catering to a pan-African audience.

In an initial analysis, 107 journals were examined from individual countries. 24 of these were published by universities and 67 by learned societies in those countries. 68 were published twice a year or annually. Although 82 of the journals were open access and available for free download, only 28 used a Creative Commons licence and only 20 were indexed in PubMed.

Although further analysis, including that of pan-African journals will be presented, initial findings suggest that the health journals published in these African countries are mostly freely available to download, but most are not indexed in PubMed.

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