

Is Gender always reported in Blood Pressure Research?

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Background

Blood pressure research is an extensive, expensive and profitable activity. During a five year period more than 21 000 articles were published on the subject blood pressure and almost 21 000 articles on the subject hypertension.

There are physiological, anatomical and pathological differences between men and women and it is therefore of importance to see how gender is reported in the scientific abstracts.

Methods

The PubMed database was searched for journal articles indexed with the MeSH terms “blood pressure” and not “female” or “male” with publication date 1980-2007 (I) and 2000-2007 (II). Only journal articles with abstracts, in English and on humans were accepted, reviews were not included. To find the genus neutral words which had been used instead of male and female, the latest 80 abstracts without “female” or “male” were read (III).

Results

I – Articles published 1980-2007

The literature search gave us 63 322 articles, 9 823 (16%) of these were not registered as female or male.

II - Articles published 2000-2007

The literature search gave us 22 374 articles, 2 741 (12%) of these were not registered as female or male.

III - Gender neutral words used instead of male or female

The latest 80 published abstracts (071001-071231) without male or female in the abstracts were read. The words used instead of male or female were: patients (22), subjects (7), volunteers/participants/individuals (8) and respondents, family members, children, neonates, Indians and divers (1 each). Some journal articles were wrongfully classified by National Library of Medicine as human but were animal research (9), others described models and technical problems (16), cell physiological topics (6) or other questions (4), two reported females/males in the study groups.

Conclusion

A large proportion of articles in blood pressure research does not describe gender. A small tendency of becoming better and more precise can be seen over time with 12% without gender descriptions in the last seven years compared to 16% in the longer period.

It is very important to be correct and informative in a short abstract. The National Library of Medicine has the possibility to fill in a code for male and female to every journal article, but this must be described by the authors. We have an old non informative medical tradition of using gender neutral descriptions, as patients or subjects, this must come to an end. The next question to be addressed is; are gender differences in the results also reported?