

The scope of the Brazilian Journal of Mother and Child Health and the CAPES Qualis

In the dissemination of scientific knowledge, the range of subject matter covered by a periodical—which basically corresponds to its scope—is established when it is founded, thus defining its identity. But we cannot exclude the possibility that external factors may later come to influence, if not the overall scope, at least some areas of it. This may occur, for example, because of increasing demand for receipt of manuscripts in a particular area. Usually the editor seeks to limit this demand in order to achieve a balanced range of subject matter. Sometimes, articles are of greater interest because of an increase in production and innovation in research on the part of the scientific community in a given field, which makes it difficult to solve the problem. On the other hand, it may not even be a problem, properly speaking, but, on the contrary, an opportunity to grow for a periodical that may have a very specific scope (as in the case of periodicals in the field of Cell biology, Genetics, Physical Letters) or be very wide-ranging in the manner of *Nature* or, even more so, *Science*. Even so, this may be deceptive, since it is possible to have, given the current state of science, a periodical that has a very specific scope with multiple sub-fields. This is more likely to occur in periodicals with a broader scope. As it is a question linked to the speed of development of science itself, the content may be determined by the appearance of new fields of study within a single area, reducing the interest of authors in classical subjects and extending it to new kinds of research. It is therefore not unlikely that the problem of altering the scope of a periodical may even lead to a change in its title or, worse, cause it to become obsolete and defunct. This phenomenon can be seen if we look at the survival of periodicals over time in databases such as Lilacs, Medline and the Institute for Scientific Information (ISI) to cite some of the more longstanding ones. There are, of course, other reasons, such as those relating to funding, sponsorship or even the management of a periodical. Still, a change of direction, reinforcing either the overall scope or that of specific area, may occur. It is therefore especially prudent for the Editor to make the greatest efforts to ensure that his or her decisions are compatible with the survival or the growth of the periodical.

In the case of Brazil, it would seem that current science policy has influenced this issue. Many periodicals are heavily dependent for their survival on organs of the Ministry of Science and Education (such as the Coordinating Board for the Improvement of Higher Education Staff - CAPES and the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development - CNPq) either directly in terms of financial support, or indirectly in terms of emphasis on certain areas of research. In the latter case, periodicals may have to take decisions fundamental to their scope in order to meet the new demands of potential authors. In the the case of the Brazilian Journal of Mother and Child Health (RBSMI), its broad scope has been undergoing the influence of its profile, which may be related to CNPq and CAPES policy with regard to science. In fact, our scope is broad. The instructions to the authors state that “the Journal’s mission is to disseminate scientific articles in the field of mother and child health, with contributions covering the different aspects of maternal health, women’s health and child health, along with the various biomedical, socio-cultural and epidemiological factors that impact these”.

It is thus, depending on interest in specific areas, that the periodical has developed, over time with a greater or smaller proportion of articles in these areas. On the other hand, the CAPES Qualis evaluation policy, which is, in turn, a mechanism interrelated with specific post-graduate programs in the country, ends up driving a re-orientation of the scope of periodicals. Since, with this situation of interdependence, the post-graduation publications provide support for CAPES with the Qualis ranking, and thus a better quality periodical in a certain area is also approached by more potential authors and thus receives greater recognition a representative of the area in question. Thus the scope of the RBSMI, which includes clinical, biological an even epidemiological is-

sues, is recognized by the scientific community as a Collective Health periodical and has received a Qualis score of B1.

Of course, the fact that a periodical has multiple characteristics entails the possibility that other well-known higher-ranking periodicals with a more specific scope will be more sought after, thus reducing the number of articles in these subfields.

Finally, we should be aware that positive aspects may also arise from this, because we achieve greater visibility and prestige in the field in which we are at present strongest and this ends up strengthening the periodical.

We are happy with this, but at the same time regret the lack of development in other areas.

We do not know how this is for other periodicals, but it would be a good time for them to look into the matter.

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