

# Do Scientists lose Control over Scientific Publishing?

A PRC Dialogue with

**Nino Künzli, MD PhD, Environmental Epidemiologist**

Prof. em. Swiss TPH and University of Basel, former Dean Swiss School of Public Health (SSPH+)

**UZH Population Research Center (PRC)**

November 25, 2025; 12:00 - 13:00h - UZH City Campus, KOL-F-104

## My disclaimers and background for this lecture



- SSPH+ representative of the SSPH+ Journals **Int J Public Health** & **Public Health Reviews**
- Chaired SSPH+ decision and move of IJPH to Open Access (since 2021)
- Chaired SSPH+ decision to buy PHR from ASPHER (Association of Schools of Public Health of the European Region)
- Open Access Publishing services for IJPH and PHR provided by *Frontiers Media*, Lausanne
- Supervisor of SSPH+ Editorial Manager Office (at Swiss TPH)
- Member Editorial Board of Int J Pub Health (IJPH) since 1997 & Co-Editor in Chief since 2012
- Published peer-reviewed articles since 1992; h-Index is aging
- Act as reviewer since 1995 (10-20 articles/yr)
- Was associate Editor Epidemiology (until 2016), Respiration (until 2019), Swiss Medical Weekly (until 2020)
- Taught applied SSPH+ course for junior scientists on journal editing

# Preamble

## Talk is not about predatory publishing, fraud, misconduct

Fraud exists because some **scientists engage in** :

- parallel submissions
- plagiarism
- submissions to ~10'000+ predatory journals publishing >400'000 articles/yr without peer-review
- buying/ selling authorships,
- let paper mill industries submit «their» papers
- submit reviews written by AI
- spread defamations and «black lists» against respected Open Access Journals

**It is the responsibility of academia to PREVENT AND STOP the use of fraudulent offers through education, regulation, policies, sanctions and... the removal of ill-defined academic incentives...**



**Predatory journals: what can we do to protect their prey?**

**Christine Laine et al; Lancet 2025**

**“It is worrisome that despite the awareness of these entities for many years, academicians still fall prey to them.”**

# Agenda

- 9 Proposals...
- Discussion

**PS:**

**PEOH** stands for «Public Environmental Occupational Health» category in Web-of-Science

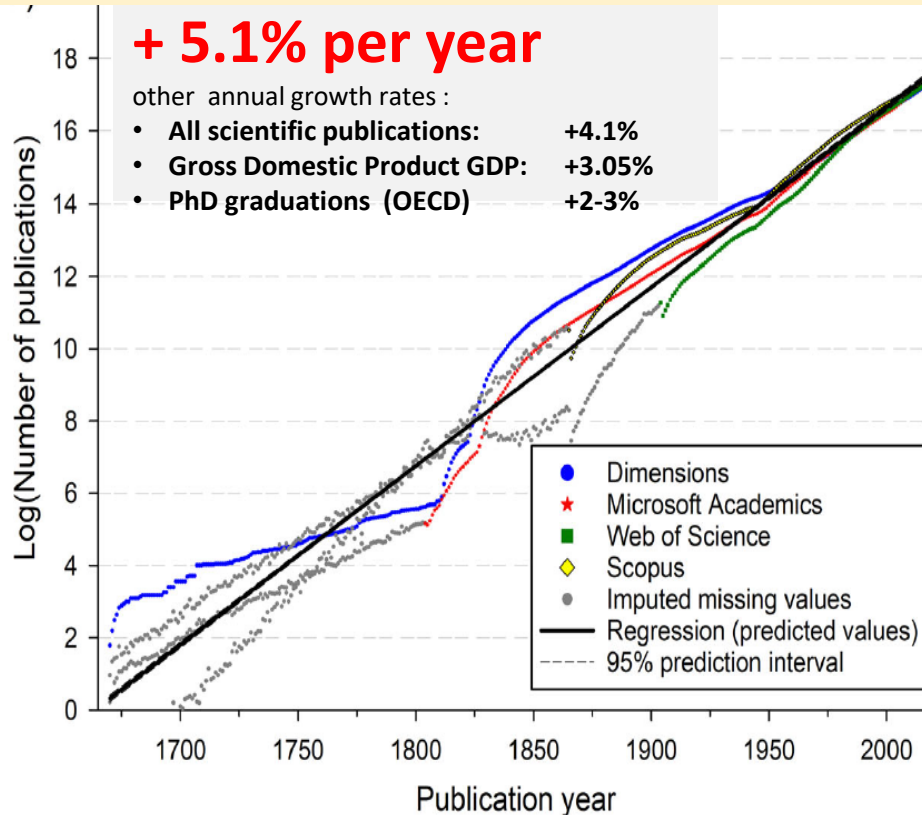


Proposal 1: Change narrative about “too much publishing” – be proud of growth

# Global annual growth rates in scientific publishing

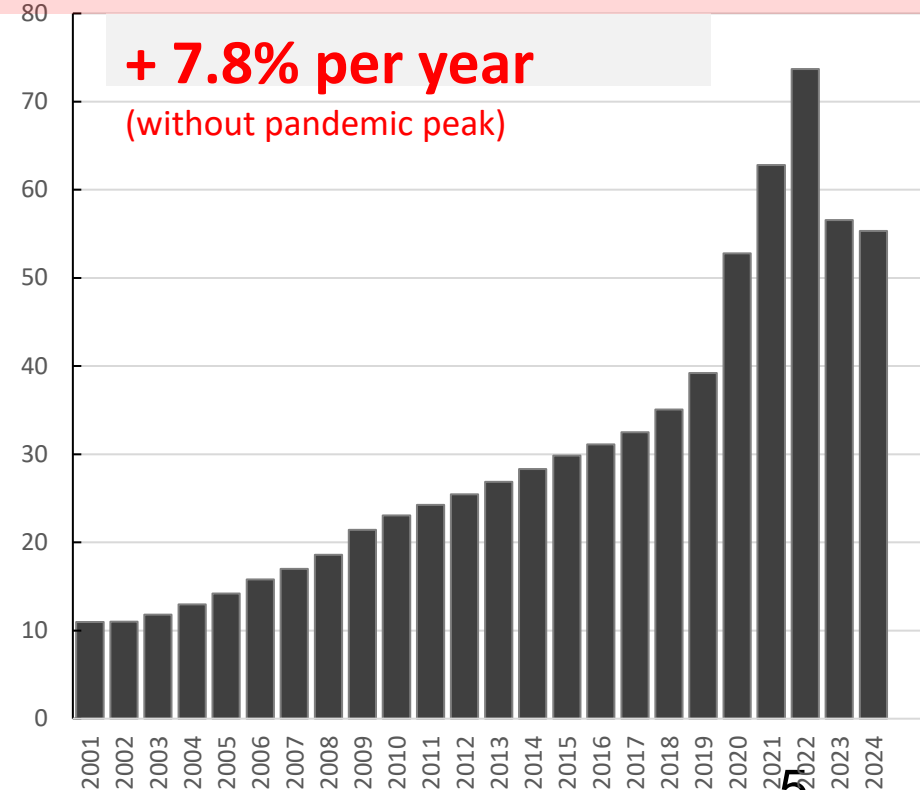
## Life Sciences (1660-2018)

Bornmann et al, 2021



## «Public Environmental Occupational Health» (PEOH) (2000-2024)

in Thousands – from Web-of-Science, accessed 25.5.25



Proposal 1: Change narrative about “too much publishing” – be proud of growth

Proposal 2: Promote OPEN ACCESS – 100%

- **Gold Open Access**: authors (or the funders of science) pay a publishing fee (APC = Article Processing Charges). Free to read
- **Diamond Open Access**: no costs for authors and readers (funders of science cover all costs)

**52% of PEOH publications:  
still behind paywall (2024)**

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Proposal 3: Move “publishing funds” into Diamond & Gold Open Access – **no hybrids**

## STOP Open Access Hybrid publishing

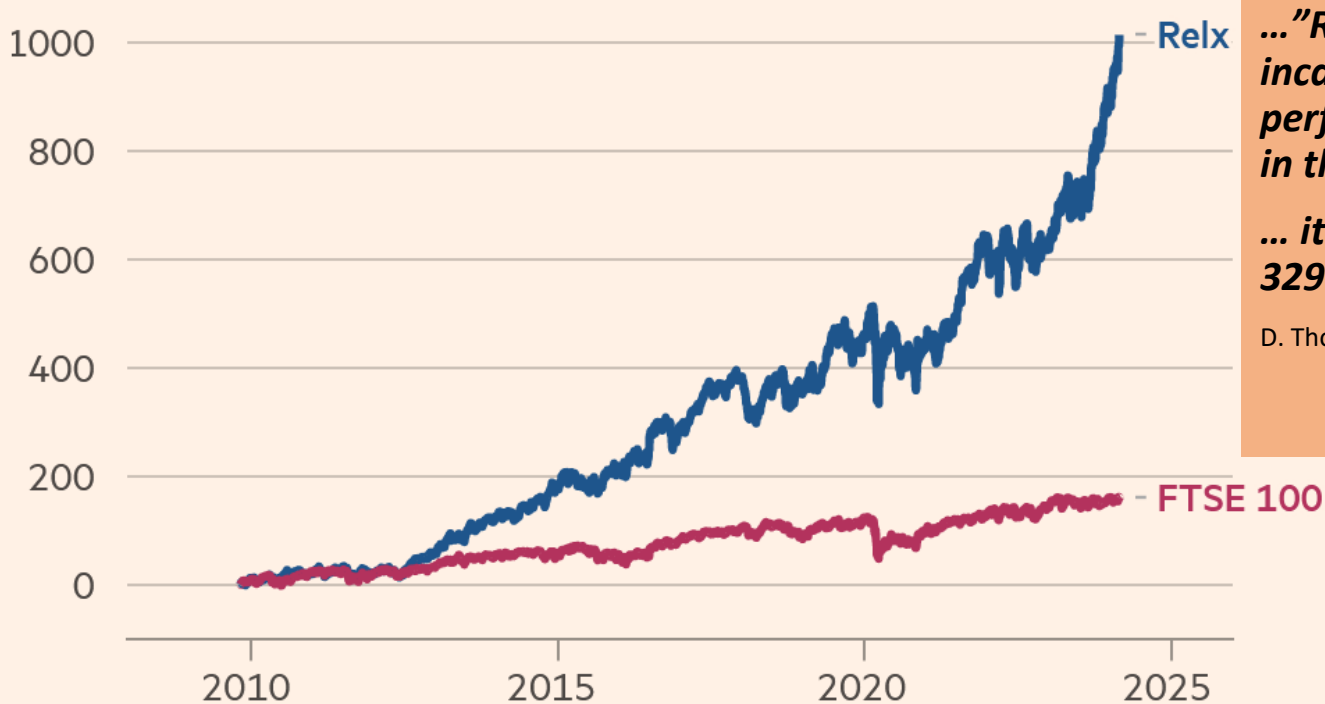
Double dipping strategy:

- Charge for subscriptions
- Charge APC fees for Gold Open Access

**APC = Article Processing Charges**

## Stock performance of Financial Times Stock Exchange 100 versus «RELX» (Reed-Elsevier)

**operating profit: 37%**  
**(Meta or Google: 23-25%)**



*... "RELX, or its previous incarnations, has been the top-performing stock on the FTSE 100 in the index's 40-year history"...*

*... it outperformed the FTSE 100 by 329%...*

D. Thomas and H Agnew, Financial Times, 23.2.2024

**CEO Engstrom 2023 salary: £13.6mn – one of the highest paid CEO's of all FTSE 100**



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# Where do scientists sleep during research conferences?



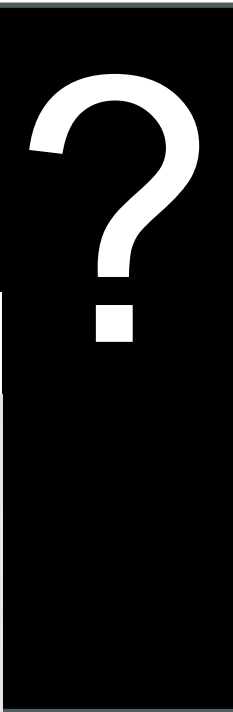
GUCCI



Diana Shopper



Edge men



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### Some GUCCI journals

Nature Communication	\$6'990
Lancet	\$7'800
Lancet Public Health	\$6'680
Lancet Global Health	\$6'680
Lancet Planetary Health	\$6'680

Some Nature brands > 12'000

### Examples of independent Society Journals:

Swiss Medical Weekly	Diamond (0 CHF)
Am J Pub Health (hybrid):	\$2'300

 <b>IJPH</b>	(Gold OA) \$2'800 (i.e. CHF 2'300)
 <b>PHR</b>	(Gold OA) \$2'400 (i.e. CHF 1'980)

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Proposal 5: Protect the scientists' right to decide where to publish Gold/Diamond OA

## Proposal 5: Protect the scientists' right to decide where to publish Gold/Diamond OA



Elsevier	(20%)
SpringerNature	(19%)
Wiley	(7%)

**= FOR-PROFIT HYBRID  
PUBLISHERS!**

**URGENTLY NEEDED:  
FREE BEER for leading  
GOLD OPEN ACCESS publishers**

1. Frontiers (for-profit) (9%)
  2. Oxford Univ. Press (not-f.-pr) (4%)
  3. BMJ Publishing (not-for-profit) (2%)
  4. Cambridge Univ. Press (not-f-pr) (<2%)
  5. PLOS (not-for-profit) (<2%)
- ... and many others!

% reflect 2024 share of publications in PEOH category

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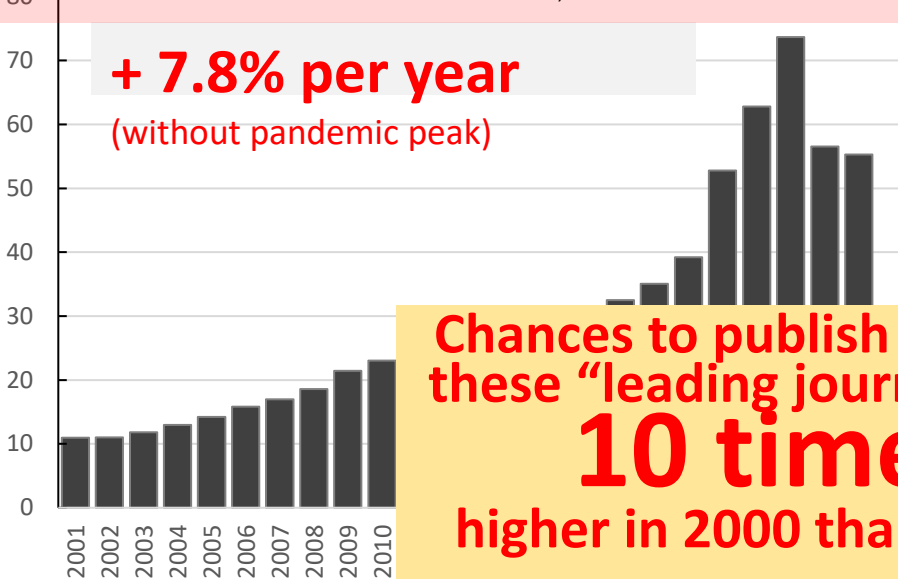
Proposal 5: Protect the scientists' right to decide where to publish Gold/Diamond OA

Proposal 6: Boycott journals that refuse to grow (“quota journals”)

# Where can scientist publish if good journals do not grow some 8-10% per year?

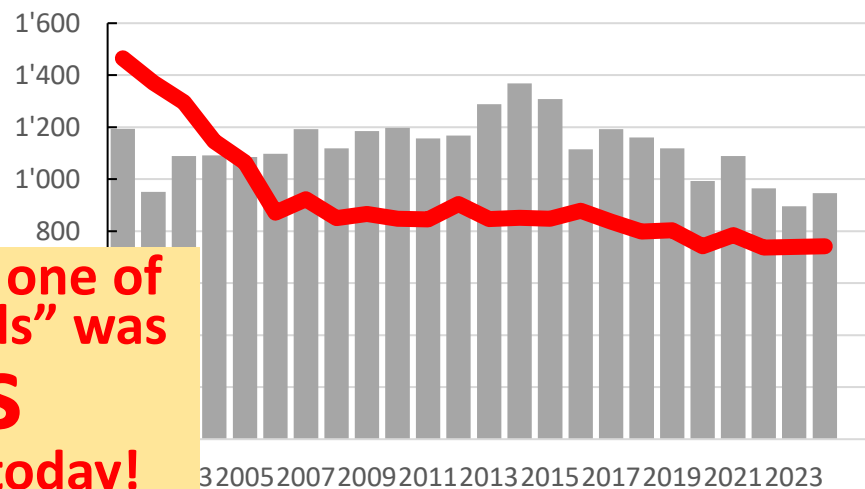
## «Public Environmental Occupational Health» (PEOH) (2000-2024)

in Thousands – from Web-of-Science, accessed 25.5.25



Chances to publish in one of these “leading journals” was  
**10 times**  
higher in 2000 than today!

10 «prestigious» PEOH hybrid journals (in my field \*) resist to accomodate growth



\*) PEOH Journals: American Journal of Epidemiology, American Journal of Public Health, Epidemiology, European Journal of Epidemiology, International Journal of Epidemiology, Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health, Journal of Exposure Science and Environmental Epidemiology  
+ Lancet, NEJM, JAMA

# Wake up! The PEOH publishing world\*) is changing<sup>26</sup>

## Year 2000

~11'000 pubs - (i.e. articles and reviews)

**84 publishers...**

28 (33%) publish 85% of all pubs

**34 (40%) were not-for-profit publishers**

**NOTE:** distinction between (not-for-profit) “society journals” and (for-profit) “publisher-owned journals” not available

## Year 2025

~50'000 pubs

**184 publishers**

only 16 (8.7%) publish 85% of all

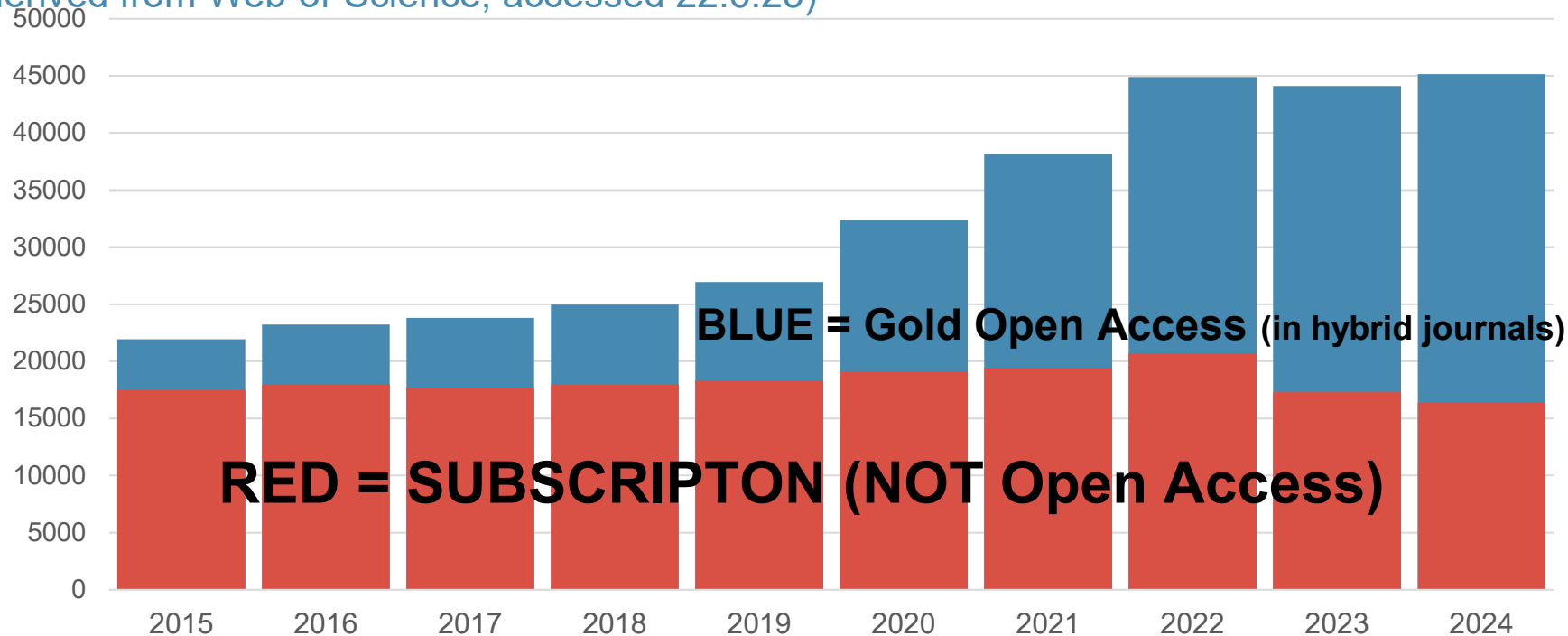
**24 (13%) are not-for-profit versus**

\*) WoS category “Public Environmental Occupation Health” – but same pattern for health sciences in general



# Closer look at the QUOTA HYBRID - Open Access strategy

Articles and reviews published by the 10 leading \*) hybrid publishers (PEOH category only)  
derived from Web-of-Science, accessed 22.6.25)



\*) Elsevier, Springer Nature, Wiley, Sage, Taylor & Francis, Oxford Univ Press, BMJ Publishing Group, Wolters Kluwer Med Publications, Cambridge Univ Press, Lippincott Williams & Wilkins

**In 2024: those published 65% of all PEOH articles/reviews. Elsevier + Springer N: 38% of all**

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Proposal 7: Stand up against defamations targeting Gold Open Access publishers

# Conspiracy-like academic circles spread defamations against Open Access journals... including the independent SSPH+ journals!

## Most recent scandal:

- Finnish academic board JUFO provides Ministry of Science & Culture ranking of all journals (relevant for university funding distribution)
- As of Jan 25: PHR and IJPH got blacklisted as “suspicious Level 0” without any formal assessment (“gut feelings” of conspiracy-driven committee members)
- Revoked only in June 2025 (but only to Level 1 instead of 2 such as Eur J Pub H)
- No response nor explanation yet from JUFO nor from Finnish Ministry of Science and Culture



- Full story on SSPH+ website:



International Journal of Public Health  
COMMENTARY  
published: 13 May 2025  
doi: 10.3389/ijph.2025.1608614



## Conspiracies in Academia? Stand Up Against Defamations of Open Access Journals!

Nino Künzli<sup>1,2\*</sup>, Christopher Woodrow<sup>1\*</sup>, Luca Crivelli<sup>2,3</sup>, Kasia Czabanowska<sup>4</sup>,  
Olaf von dem Knesebeck<sup>5</sup>, Andrea Madarasova Geckova<sup>6</sup>, Sarah Mantwill<sup>7</sup>, Sunghea Park<sup>1</sup>,  
Milo Puhan<sup>2,8</sup>, Ana Isabel Ribeiro<sup>9</sup> and L. Suzanne Suggs<sup>2,10</sup>

10.3389/ijph.2025.1608614



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**Proposal 8: Call for the Editors' independence and expertise to protect QUALITY**

# Authors, Editors and Reviewers

= Epicentre of quality control in scientific publishing

## Editors-in-chief & handling editors:

- Steer entire peer review
- Make all editorial decisions  
(desk rejections, promotion to peer review, request for revisions, assessment of reviews, final approval or rejection)

**→ Expertise and ethical values of scientific editors determine quality**

# Two editorial models of peer-review journals

## Traditional model

### Decision making EDITORS are...

- leading scientists
- at independent research institutions
- experts in the field of manuscripts
- make independent decisions
- publisher has no role

## Business-owned model

### Decision-making EDITORS are...

- Staff hired by the publisher
- Not leading scientists
- Not necessarily experts in the field of manuscripts
- independence of decisions not guaranteed

## Guidelines of the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (updated 2024)

**2. Editorial Freedom: ..... editors-in-chief have full authority over the entire editorial content of their journal and the timing of publication of that content. Journal owners should not interfere in the evaluation, selection, scheduling, or editing of individual articles either directly or by creating an environment that strongly influences decisions. ....**

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## Examples of journals in Public Environmental Occupational Health category

- **Int J Public Health**
- **Public Health Reviews**
- **European J Public Health and....**  
...many other “society journals”
- **Frontiers Public Health**
- **etc.**

- **Lancet Public Health**
- **Lancet Global Health** **APC \$6'680**
- **Lancet Planetary Health**
- **All 4 Lancet Regional Health journals**
- (all Nature-branded journals)

# Association between particulate matter (PM)<sub>2.5</sub> air pollution and clinical antibiotic resistance: a global analysis



Zhenchao Zhou, Xinyi Shuai, Zejun Lin, Xi Yu, Xiaoliang Ba, Mark A Holmes, Yonghong Xiao, Baojing Gu, Hong Chen



Lancet Planetary Health, 2023

## Summary

These findings substantiate that PM<sub>2.5</sub> is a primary factor driving global antibiotic resistance, suggesting global health could benefit from mitigating antibiotic resistance with PM<sub>2.5</sub> controls. This is the first report on the association between ambient air pollution and clinical antibiotic resistance.

**They assigned 33+% of Antibiotic-Resistance-Mortality to ambient air pollution !!**





# Be Aware: Science Is Not Ready to Calculate the Antimicrobial Resistance Death due to Air Pollution

*Nino Künzli<sup>1,2\*</sup>, Meltem Kutlar Joss<sup>1,2</sup> and Ron Kappeler<sup>1,2</sup>*

*<sup>1</sup>Swiss Tropical and Public Health Institute, Allschwil, Switzerland, <sup>2</sup>University of Basel, Basel, Switzerland*

## The ill-define method and the false conclusion

- passed the Lancet Planetary Health peer review process (5 reviewers!)
- resulted in a huge global media echo
- collected >70 citations (Oct 25) – featured in Web-of-Sci as a «highly cited paper»...!
- Fosters Lancet Planet H Impact Factor... **(JIF 2024: 21.6)**
- Misleads policies (... and funds) needed to control antimicrobial resistance

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**Proposal 9: Stop the worship, adoration and tribute to the Journal Impact Factor**

Despite the 2012 San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA)

# JIF = Journal Impact Factor

remains the toxic currency of academia

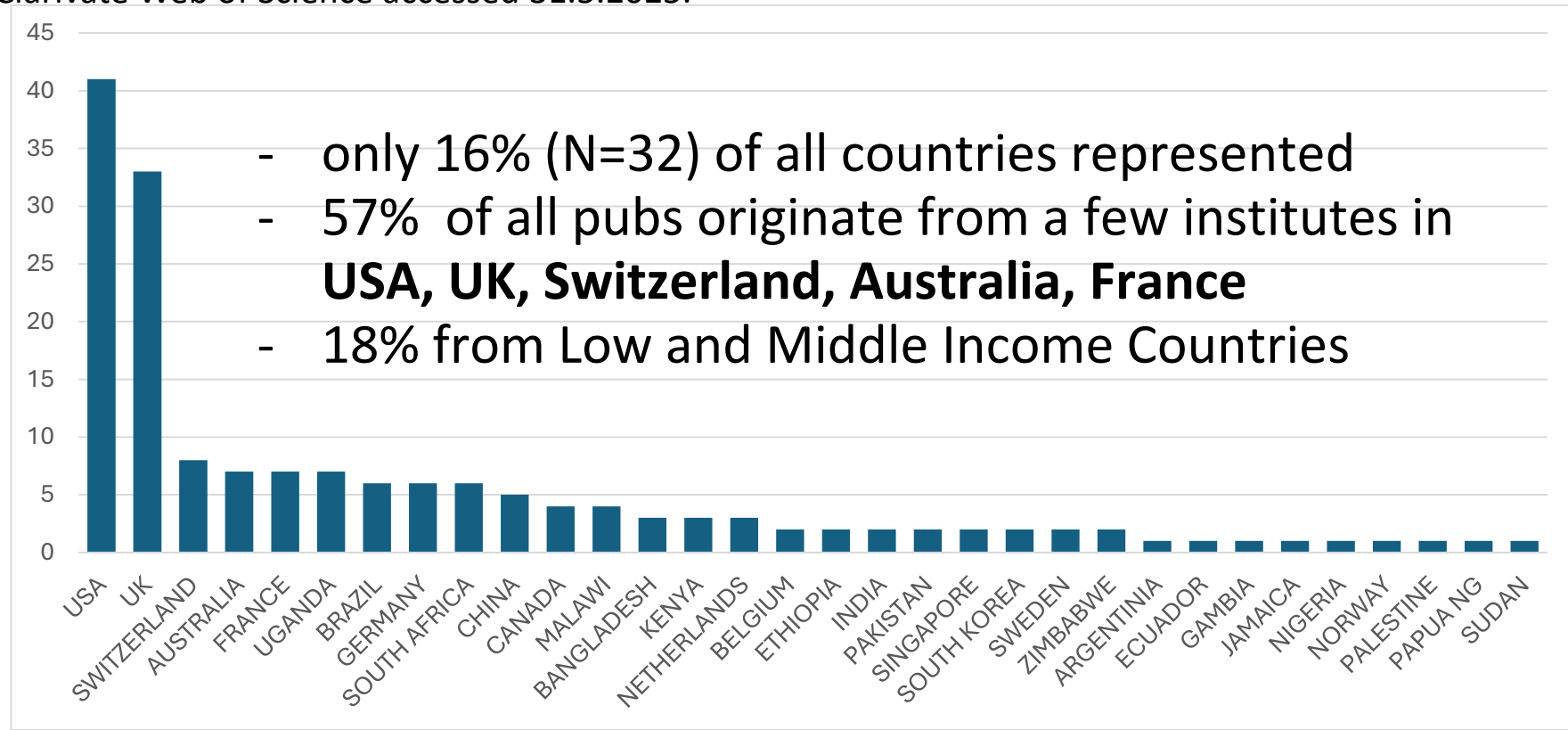
**Still, no alternative standardized accessible quality indicators available  
(e.g.: the scientific standing of the editors... )**

**The JIF remains THE dominant indicator in academic  
assessments and decisions about publishing, reading,  
citing, reviewing... and shaping careers... !**

# The small elite world of Lancet “Global” Health

Affiliation country of first authors of 2024 articles and reviews (N=168)

Clarivate Web of Science accessed 31.5.2025.





*Email from author, during peer review  
(fall 2024)*

*Dear Editor,  
....., your journal's impact factor has decreased to  
2.6. Since our institution... can only pay fees for  
journals with an impact factor of more than 3 points,  
..... **Therefore, we ... request the withdrawal of  
the manuscript....***

# In conclusion.... I propose CHANGE....

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# ... namely to **PRIORITIZE**....

## 1) As an **AUTHOR**:

- Open Access Journals (no hybrids)
- ...published by Gold OA publishers (not hybrid publishers)
- ... owned by not-for-profit academic societies
- ... led by independent leading scientists (editors)
- ... that accomodate growth
- Cite not only «Impact Factor» novelty
- Engage as **REVIEWER** for as many articles as you co-author

## 2) As **REVIEWER** for:

- Open Access Journals (no hybrids)
- ...published by Gold OA publishers (not hybrid publishers)
- ... owned by not-for-profit academic societies
- ... led by independent leading scientists (editors)
- ... that accomodate growth
- ... while ignoring JIFactor



Public Health Reviews  
EDITORIAL  
published: 17 November 2022  
doi: 10.3389/phrs.2022.1605407



## «I Do Not Have Time»—Is This the End of Peer Review in Public Health Sciences?

Nino Künzli<sup>1,2,3\*</sup>, Anke Berger<sup>1,3</sup>, Katarzyna Czabanowska<sup>4</sup>, Raquel Lucas<sup>5</sup>,  
Andrea Madarasova Geckova<sup>6</sup>, Sarah Mantwill<sup>7</sup> and Olaf von dem Knesebeck<sup>8</sup>



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- Engage as **REVIEWER** for as many articles as you co-author

## 2) Act as **REVIEWER** for:

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- ... owned by not-for-profit academic societies
- ... led by independent leading scientists (editors)
- ... that accomodate growth
- ... while ignoring JIFactor

## 3) as **senior scientist**:

- Be a role model
- Encourage the juniors to do «all of the above»

## 4) As an **EDITOR**

- Accept an editor position only in a «prioritized journal»
- Combat «quota» rules, if any
- Make solid pre-screen decision to minimize post-per-review rejection rates

## 5) As an **academic leader**

- Foster these discussions in committees, boards, etc.
- Combat ill-defined narratives («too much publishing»; blacklisting Gold OA publishers etc)
- Pressure for «free beer» also for Gold OA journals
- Combat the JIFactor addiction

Thank you

... and contact us if you are editor of an independent society journal... we should collaborate...

[Nkuenzli@SSPHplus.ch](mailto:Nkuenzli@SSPHplus.ch)

# Swiss National Science Foundation covers Open Access (OA) APC fee only in “regular issues” (... but calls for “100% OA”)



International Journal of Public Health  
COMMENTARY

published: 22 December 2023  
doi: 10.3389/ijph.2023.1606967



## Chocolate Eaters Do Not Necessarily Win a Nobel Prize—Authors in Special Issues Do Not Necessarily Publish Lower Quality Papers

*Nino Künzli<sup>1,2,3\*</sup>, Christopher Woodrow<sup>1,2,3</sup>, Anke Berger<sup>1,2,3</sup>, Katarzyna Czabanowska<sup>4</sup>, Licia Iacoviello<sup>5,6</sup>, Raquel Lucas<sup>7</sup>, Andrea Madarasova Geckova<sup>8</sup>, Sonja Merten<sup>1,2</sup>, Olaf von dem Knesebeck<sup>9</sup>, Sarah Mantwill<sup>10</sup>, Salvatore Panico<sup>11</sup>, Lyda Osorio<sup>12</sup>, Ana Isabel Ribeiro<sup>7</sup>, Paolo Chiodini<sup>13</sup>, L. Suzanne Suggs<sup>3,14</sup> and Jean Coulibaly<sup>15</sup>*

Frontiers, like other for-profit open access publishers, has struggled with a perception it has low editorial standards and weak peer review. But is that true? **Brian Owens** reports

Brian Owens *freelance journalist*

BMJ March 27 2024

“I don’t have a lot of sympathy for the idea that Frontiers is any worse,” he says.