

Perceived Challenges to Open-peer Review and Opportunities for Education

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Abstract

Objective: Anonymous peer review, the trademark of most scientific journals has been criticized for its lack of accountability/transparency. Open-peer review, defined as a transparent process whereby the identities of those reviewing scientific publications are disclosed to authors, has only been adopted by a small number of journals/publishers. We examined receptiveness to an open-peer review process.

Methods: A 9-question multiple-choice survey was emailed via QuestionPro to editors/publishers in the health sciences field; 56% (5/9) responded.

Results: No respondents employed an open-peer review process; only 1 journal stated that the topic was currently under discussion. The remaining respondents who indicated no plans for an open-peer review process cited as reasons belief that the review quality will be negatively affected, increased difficulty in recruiting new reviewers and disagreement with open-peer review. When asked about their awareness of scientific research surrounding open-peer review, 40% (2/5) indicated no awareness, 60% (3/5) indicated some awareness, and none indicated a high level of awareness. Interest in a forum where the risks/benefits of open-peer review could be discussed was favored by 80% (4/5) of respondents. Participants rank-ordered 5 perceived challenges of open-peer review. Belief that review-quality would be negatively affected (80% [4/5]) and perceived difficulties in recruiting new peer reviewers were ranked as the top challenges to implementing open-peer review (60% [3/5]).

Conclusion: While the survey size limits the ability to generalize, data indicate an opportunity for further education, discussion, and research in this area.

BACKGROUND

- Research articles have traditionally been reviewed anonymously before acceptance for publication. Anonymous peer review, a process in which reviewers are aware of the identities of the authors but the authors do not know the identities of the reviewers, has been criticized because it is open to bias and ethical abuse, and lacks accountability and transparency. Anonymous reviewers have the opportunity to inappropriately delay or prevent or promote publication of work or usurp ideas, wording, and methods from manuscripts they are reviewing.¹⁻⁵
- An open-peer review, in which reviewers and authors are aware of each other's identities would be expected to increase accountability, fairness, and transparency^{6,7} but has been adopted by few scientific journals or publishers.

Table 1. Survey Content

Survey Question	Response Choices	Respondents (n)
1. Does your publishing company and/or journal currently employ an open-peer review process?	Yes or no	5
2. If you answered YES to Q1, how long have you had an open-peer review process?	Less than 6 months; 6 months–1 year; 1–3 years; 3–5 years; 5+ years	0
3. If you answered YES to Q1, what was the MAIN REASON for deciding to implement an open-peer review process?		0
4. If you answered YES to Q1, what challenges, if any, did you face in implementing an open-peer review process? Please check ALL that apply.	Reluctance by some authors; reluctance by some reviewers; some peer reviewers refusing to review articles; more time needed to complete the peer review process; need for more internal infrastructure to monitor process; quality of reviews was affected; difficulty recruiting new/future peer reviewers; other	0
5. The following challenges have been identified in open-peer review process. Please rank order the items with 1 = the biggest perceived challenge and 5 = the least perceived challenge.	Believe that peer reviewers will refuse to review future articles; will add too much time to complete the peer review process; cannot support the internal infrastructure needed to monitor process; believe the quality of reviews will be negatively affected; believe that there will be difficulty recruiting new peer reviewers	5
6. If you answered NO to Q1, does your publishing company and/or journal intend to do so in the future?	Yes, in the next 6 months; yes, in the next year; yes, in the next 12+ months; the topic is currently under discussion; no, there is currently no plan to implement an open-peer review process	5
7. If you answered NO to Q1 and if there is currently no plan to implement an open-peer review process, please check all the reasons that apply.	Disagree with an open-peer review process; believe that peer reviewers will refuse to review future articles; will add too much time to complete the peer review process; cannot support the internal infrastructure needed to monitor the process; believe the quality of reviews will be negatively affected; believe that there will be difficulty recruiting new peer reviewers; other	4
8. Are you aware of the scientific research that has been conducted to date on open-peer review?	Very aware; somewhat aware; not aware at all	5
9. Would you be interested in a forum where the benefits and risks of an open-peer review could be discussed and debated?	Yes or no	5

OBJECTIVE

- We sought to examine awareness, receptiveness, and perceptions about the open-peer review process in the healthcare journal arena.

METHODS

- A 9-question, multiple-choice survey (Table 1) was developed and emailed via QuestionPro to 9 editors/publishers in the health sciences field inviting their feedback on the survey (editors/publishers were chosen based on previous working relationships).
- Decision for open-peer review could reside at either journal or publisher level.
- Five (56%) of the 9 invitees responded.

RESULTS

- Responders represented journals and publishers covering a range of therapeutic areas, specialties, and countries.
- Two (40%) of the responders were editors in chief; three (60%) indicated "other" (editorial director, sales professional, and publisher/editor in chief).
- None of the journals/publishing companies of the respondents used open-peer review.
- Of the responders, 3 (60%) were somewhat aware and 2 (40%) were not at all aware of scientific debate on open-peer review.
- Four (80%) of responders stated their journal/publishing company had no current plans to implement open-peer review; one (20%) stated that the topic was currently under discussion.
- The most common reason cited for lack of interest in implementing open-peer review was belief that review quality would be negatively affected (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Reasons Cited for Not Implementing Open-peer Review (n = 4)

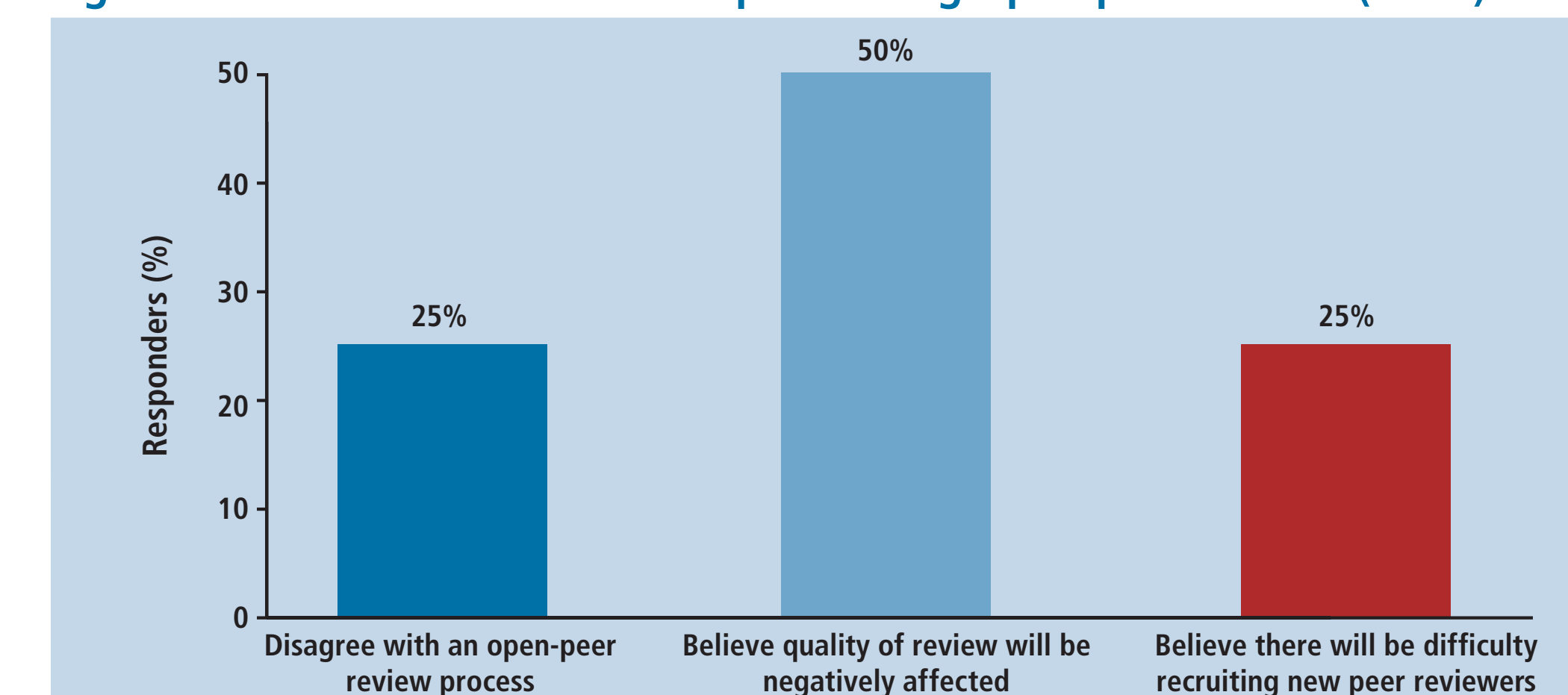
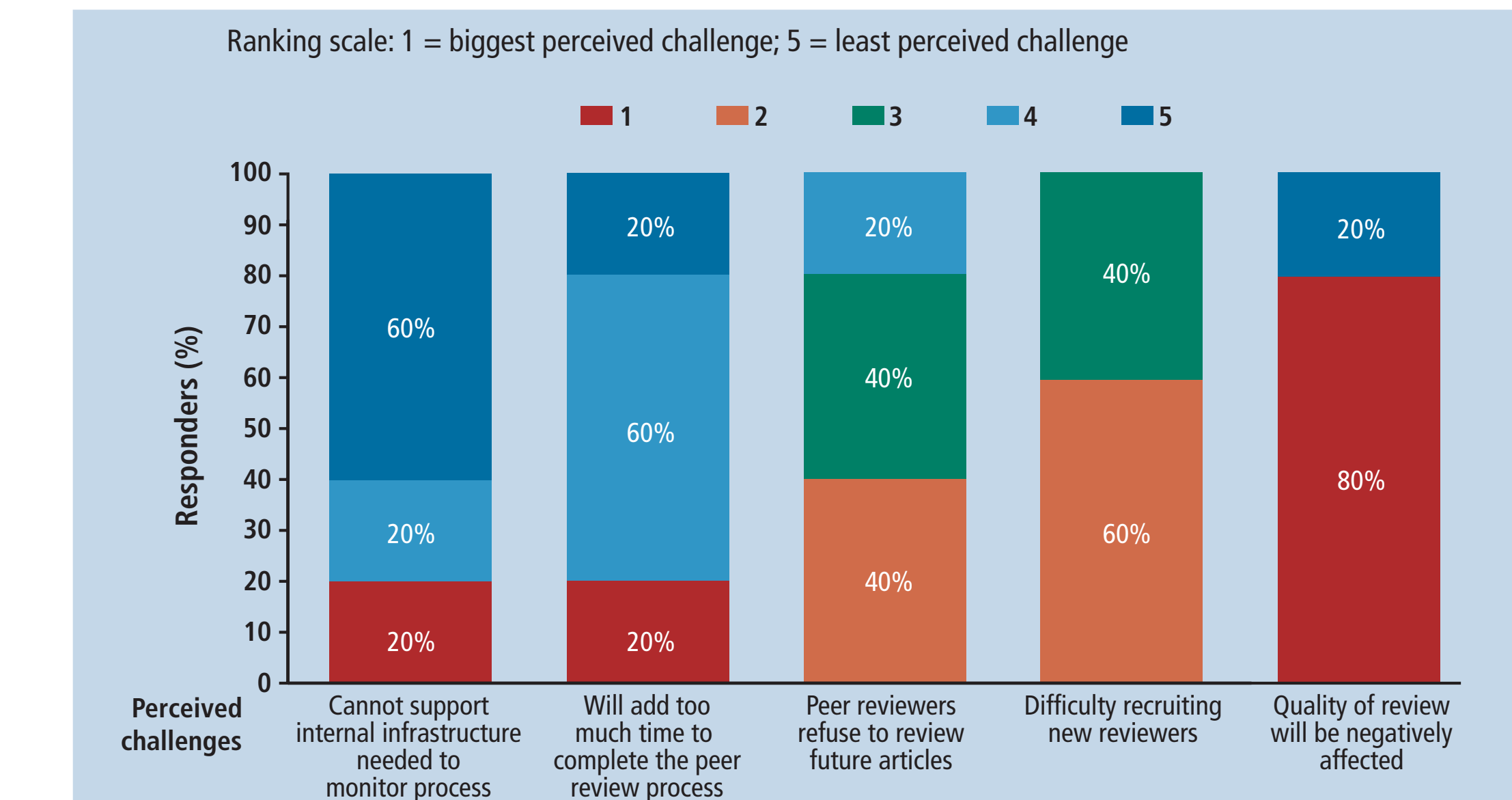


Figure 2. Rank Order of Perceived Challenges to an Open-peer Review Process (n = 5)



- The reasons ranked most challenging for implementing open-peer review were: belief that the quality of the review would be negatively affected (80% [4/5]) and perceived difficulties in recruiting new peer reviewers (60% [3/5]) (Figure 2).
- Eighty percent (4/5) of responders expressed interest in a forum where the benefits and risks of open-peer review could be discussed and debated.

CONCLUSIONS

- While no responders used open-peer review or were very aware of the scientific research conducted to date on open-peer review, most were interested in a forum where open-peer review could be discussed and debated.
- The survey size limits the ability to generalize but results indicate an opportunity for further education, discussion, and research in this area.
- The questionnaire used in this study sought feedback from journal editors/publishers. Authors, peer reviewers, and readers may have different views.

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