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Section 6: Research trends

Women's not-for-profit organizations' research output – characterizations and trends

Dr. Gali Halevi

In this article we investigate the main characteristics of research output sponsored by, or associated with, not-for-profit organizations which focus on women's issues. Women's foundations, associations and societies play an important role in our community by promoting, creating awareness of, collaborating on or conducting research on topics that are at the heart of women's existence in society. Issues such as health, family, education, equality, employment and empowerment are some of the foci of thousands of women's foundations and other not-for-profit organizations around the world. Through a variety of activities such as, among others, workshops, special events, local and community publications, these organizations impact the lives of women and their families every day.

Women's not-for-profit organizations and research output

The work of women's not-for-profit institutions includes conducting, collaborating on or funding research in their areas of interest for the benefit of planning and policy making, and promoting awareness of major issues, among other things. Therefore, we focused on research output in the form of journal articles or conference proceedings covered by Scopus (www.scopus.com) that are either generated by or associated with not-for-profit women's organizations. The analysis focuses on (1) discovering the main subject areas covered by these publications, (2) the main research collaborations formed by these organizations, and (3) the research foci of this scientific output around the world.

A Scopus search was conducted to retrieve women's foundations, associations or societies. In order to retrieve only documents in which at least one of the authors was affiliated with a not-for-profit women's organization, we excluded publications that only had women's medical universities or departments, hospitals or medical research centers. The dataset included 764 documents (as of March 19th, 2013), each having at least one women's foundation, association or society in its listed affiliations. To validate our set, we manually examined 60 random records to confirm that they all had at least one affiliation which was a not-for-profit women's organization.

Findings

Research subject fields and topics covered

Women-related issues include a variety of subjects such as education, employment, civil and domestic equality, to name a few. However, the research output shows a clear dominance of health-related publications with very little research focused on social, education or economic issues.

As seen in Figure 1, Medical research accounts for over 50% of the output while Social Sciences account for 10% and Psychology and Arts & Humanities for 5% or less. Figure 2 represents the words that occur most frequently within the titles of the retrieved articles. Please note that the bigger the word is, the more times it appears in the titles of the publications. Looking at the titles of the articles retrieved, it is evident that the focus of publication is on health issues, especially breast cancer, diseases, sexual and reproductive issues.

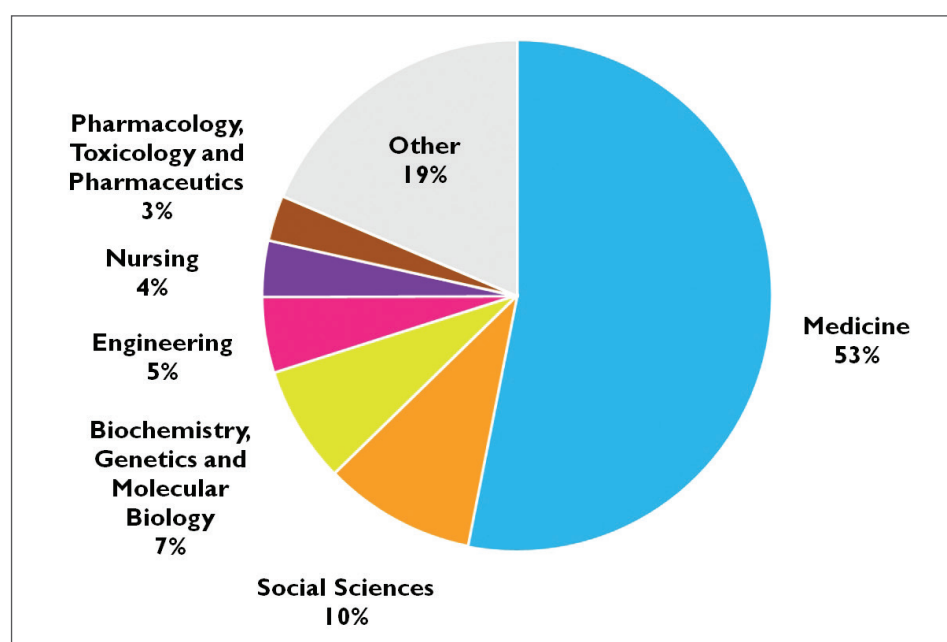


Figure 1: Research areas output affiliated with women's not-for-profit organizations.

In order to better understand what the issues covered by Social Sciences, Arts & Humanities, Psychology and other non-health related publications are, we limited the set to these subjects. Detailed examination of these, and related subjects such as Economics and Business, reveals more of the same phenomenon: health-related research is dominant. While issues such as welfare, children, and law can be seen in [Figure 3](#), which depicts the titles of publications classified as the above subjects, health is still much more prominent than others.

Co-affiliated relations with other institutions

The above findings coincide with the fact that medical departments within universities, hospitals and medical research centers are heavily represented amongst the associated affiliations of these publications. As mentioned above, each of the records retrieved for this article has at least one author associated with a not-for-profit women's organization and most articles have more than one author. The co-authorships patterns reveal strong collaborative ties between the researchers in women's foundations on the one hand and scientists from medical universities and research centers as well as hospitals on the other (see Figure 4). The prominent position of medical departments in universities as collaborating partners seems to illustrate the orientation of academic investigators towards health-related research.

A closer examination of the foundations within the overall affiliations showed that most of the research is generated by women's health foundations (i.e. International Women's Health Coalition; Women and Infants Research Foundation; Birmingham Women's Foundation Trust) which can explain the general heavy focus on health-related issues.



Figure 2: Most frequently occurring words in article titles (all subject fields).

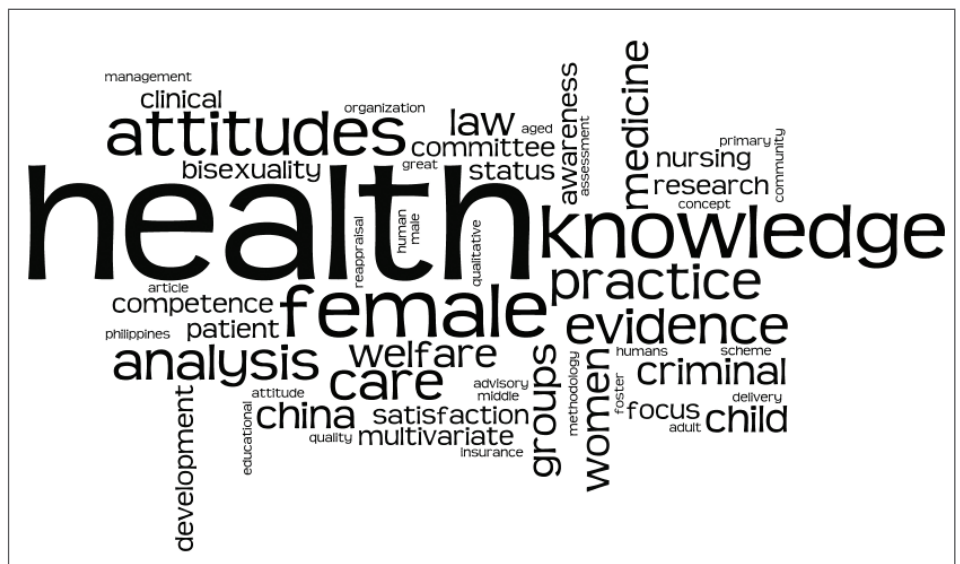


Figure 3: Most frequently occurring words in article titles in Social Sciences and Humanities.

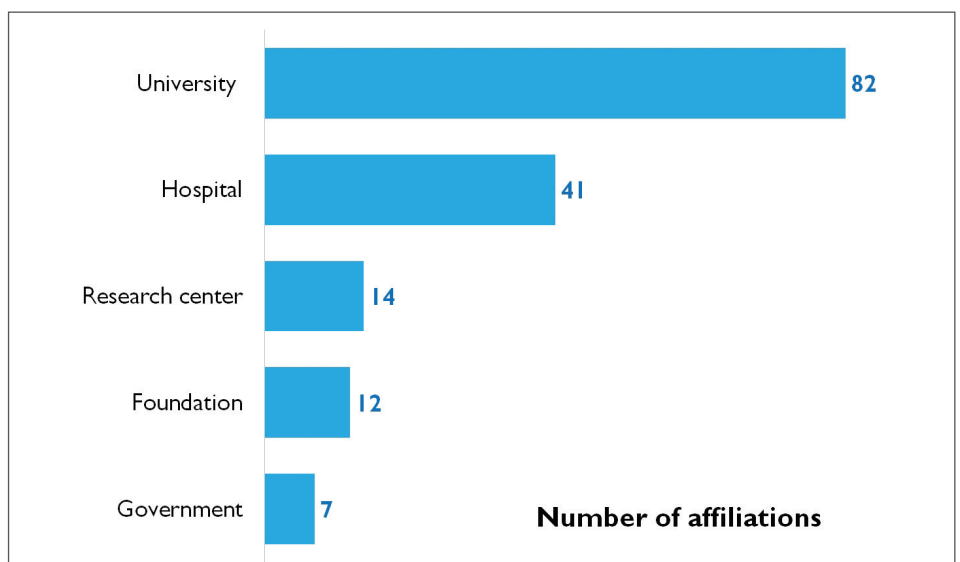


Figure 4: Collaboration partners of research conducted by women's organizations.

Research focus around the world

We conducted an analysis on the affiliations' countries of origin and looked at the author given and index keywords for the articles.

Figure 5 shows the most recurring subjects studied in Africa and the Middle East based on most recurring keyword descriptors. In the Middle East, in addition to breast cancer and child bearing, there is also research being performed on subjects such as feminism and family. In Africa, women's foundations' research focuses on pregnancy, and on HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases. This finding coincides with the UNAIDS 2012 fact sheet (http://www.unaids.org/en/media/unaids/contentassets/documents/epidemiology/2012/gr2012/2012_FS_regional_ssa_en.pdf) which states that Sub-Saharan Africa remains the most heavily affected region in the global HIV epidemic with an estimated 23.5 million [22.1–24.8 million] people living with HIV in 2011. According to this report, women in Sub-Saharan Africa remain disproportionately impacted by the HIV epidemic, accounting for 58% of all people living with HIV in that region in 2011.

The fact that issues of feminism and family are quite dominant in the Middle East coincides with the growing awareness of the importance of education for women and female adolescents. According to a report by Farzaneh Roudi-Fahimi and Valentine M. Moghadam from the Population Reference Bureau (PRB), "access to education has improved dramatically over the past few decades, and there have been a number of encouraging trends in girls' and women's education. Primary school enrollment is high or universal in most Middle East and North African countries, and gender gaps in secondary school enrollment have already disappeared in several countries. Women in (these) countries are also more likely to enroll in universities than they were in the past." (1)

Research foci in North America and Europe shown in Figures 6 and 7 are very similar. In both continents women-related publications focus on breast cancer and heart disease as well as aging and pregnancy-related issues. This finding is not surprising as heart disease is reported as the leading cause of women's deaths in the USA by the CDC (http://www.cdc.gov/dhdsdp/data_statistics/fact_sheets/fs_women_heart.htm) while breast cancer is the most common cancer among women in the United States. The same holds for Europe (<http://www.euro.who.int/en/what-we-do/health-topics/noncommunicable-diseases/cancer/news/news/2012/2/early-detection-of-common-cancers/breast-cancer>).



Figure 5: Women-related research foci in Africa and Middle East.

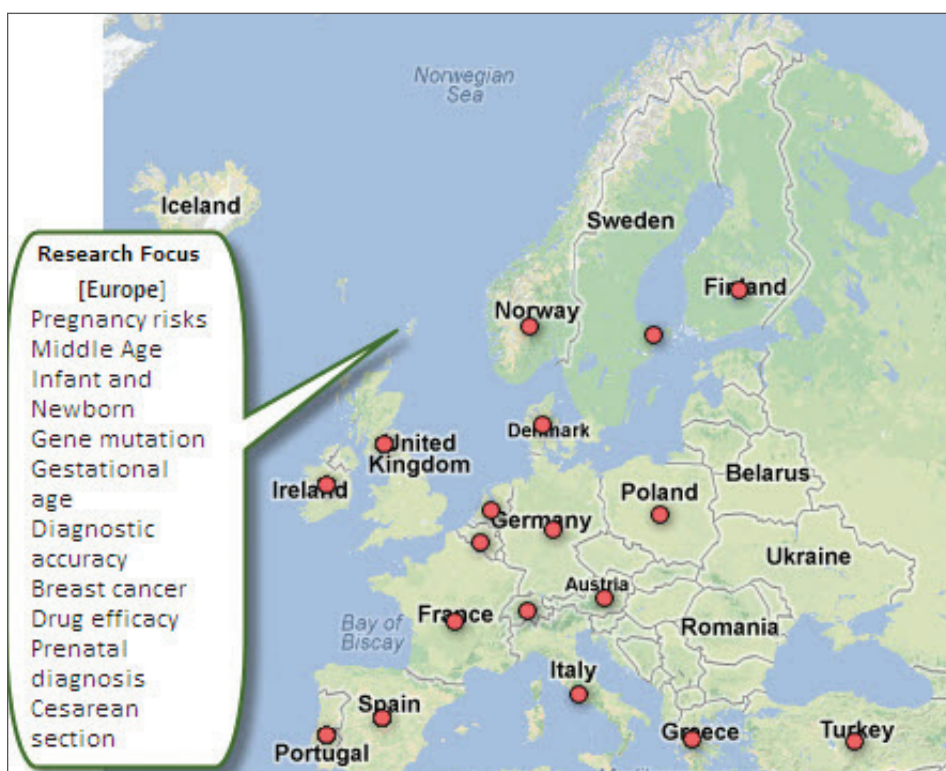


Figure 6: Women-related research foci in Europe.

In Asia there is also much focus on health-related issues as shown in Figure 8. Yet, in Asia the focus is not necessarily on specific diseases so much as on health awareness programs and health care practices. In addition in Asia there is some focus on young adults and adolescents. This could be due to the fact that well-researched diseases such as breast cancer and heart diseases that are common in North America and Europe are not as prevalent in Asia. Another reason for this could be that Asian women seem to be in better health than women in other countries but lack access to health systems (2).

Conclusions

Our research focused on the publication output affiliated with women's not-for-profit organizations such as foundations, societies and trusts. The results show an overwhelming focus on health-related research with very little research dedicated to topics related to social issues. Although health and wellness are incredibly important, issues such as equality, employment and education should also be a part of the research corpus as these have an equal effect on women's daily lives. Women's foundations should strive to encourage, sponsor and collaborate on the production of more data and findings related to social issues. Peer reviewed research publications on these topics have the potential to raise the awareness of governments and to enable better policy-making and enforcement. Equal education opportunities, and equal employment benefits and opportunities, for example, are not fully available yet in many countries and are just as important to women's well-being as finding cures to diseases and illnesses.



Figure 7: Women-related research foci in North America

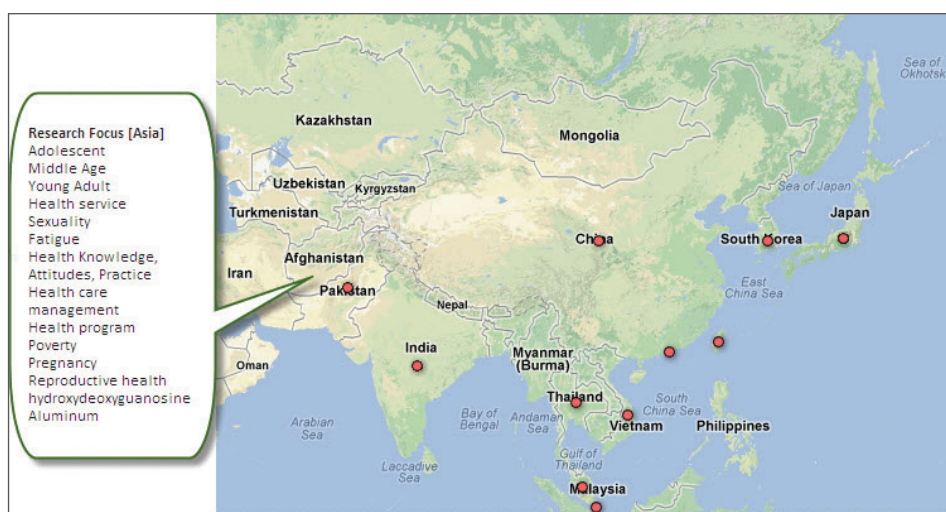


Figure 8: Women-related research foci in Asia.

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