

Impact factors of psychiatric journals

The *British Journal of Psychiatry* now has the highest impact factor of all psychiatric journals outside the USA

LOUISE HOWARD and GREG WILKINSON

Table 1 Scientific Citation Index subject category listing 1996: journals ranked by impact factor within psychiatry

Rank	Title	Impact factor	Cited half-life
1	<i>Archives of General Psychiatry</i>	11.509	9.2
2	<i>American Journal of Psychiatry</i>	6.069	7.4
3	<i>Journal of Clinical Psychopharmacology</i>	5.300	5.5
4	<i>Journal of Clinical Psychiatry</i>	4.293	5.9
5	<i>Neuropsychopharmacology</i>	3.936	4.0
6	<i>British Journal of Psychiatry</i>	3.393	7.9
7	<i>Schizophrenia Research</i>	3.256	3.7
8	<i>Schizophrenia Bulletin</i>	3.153	5.5
9	<i>Psychosomatic Medicine</i>	3.031	9.8
10	<i>Journal of Neurology, Neurosurgery and Psychiatry</i>	2.930	9.0

We have detailed the trends in impact factors of psychiatric journals from 1985 to 1994 and have discussed the use of the impact factor and its limitations (Howard & Wilkinson, 1997). The impact factor measures the frequency with which the 'average' article in a journal is cited (Garfield, 1972). Readers may be interested to know that the most recent impact factor for the *British Journal of Psychiatry* is 3.393, which is the sixth highest impact factor of all psychiatric journals in 1996 (Table 1) and the highest outside the USA. This is the highest impact factor the *Journal* has achieved since impact factors were first calculated by the Scientific Citation Index. We have reported the improvement in rankings in 1993 and 1994, and the increase in impact factors since 1991 (Howard & Wilkinson, 1997). Though the variation in impact factors for the top psychiatric journals is small and can lead to

changes in the order of journals' ranks without indicating changes of real significance, these findings together with the 1996 impact factor demonstrate a consistent rise in the impact factor of the *Journal* between 1991 and 1996.

Despite recent criticism of the use of impact factors in evaluating scientific research (Seglen, 1997) and in particular the scientific performance of individuals and research groups (Smith, 1998), they do appear useful as a measure of journal status (Optof, 1997). Readers and future authors may like to know that work published in

the *Journal* is cited relatively frequently – an indication that articles in the *Journal* are read and have an impact on the psychiatric community.

Further improvements in the *Journal's* impact factor may be limited by a nationality bias in citation, for example as has recently been found in a study of chronic fatigue syndrome literature (J. Joyce, S. Rabe-Hesketh & S. Wessely, personal communication, 1998). The North American bias in citing North American research may be much larger than any corresponding UK researchers' bias.

We will continue to strive for excellence in publishing high-quality articles in psychiatry and related disciplines that will be useful to the research and clinical community, and we will continue to monitor this using the impact factor as one of the measures of quality of the *Journal*.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We thank Professor Simon Wessely, Professor of Epidemiological and Liaison Psychiatry at the Institute of Psychiatry, for his comments on an earlier draft.

REFERENCES

- Garfield, E. (1992)** Citation analysis as a tool in journal evaluation. *Science*, **178**, 471–479.
- Howard, L. M., & Wilkinson, G. (1997)** Impact factors of psychiatric journals. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, **170**, 109–112.
- Optof, T. (1997)** Sense and nonsense about the impact factor. *Cardiovascular Research*, **33**, 1–7.
- SCI (1997)** SCI Journal Citation Reports: A bibliometric analysis of science journals in the ISI database. Philadelphia, PA: Institute for Scientific Information.
- Seglen, P. O. (1997)** Why the impact factor should not be used for evaluating research. *British Medical Journal*, **314**, 498–502.
- Smith, R. (1998)** Unscientific practice flourishes in science. *British Medical Journal*, **316**, 1036.

LOUISE HOWARD, MRCPsych, Institute of Psychiatry, London SE5 8AF; GREG WILKINSON, FRCPsych, Editor, *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 17 Belgrave Square, London SW1X 8PG

Correspondence: Louise Howard, Institute of Psychiatry, London SE5 8AF

(First received 5 February 1998, revised 23 February 1998, accepted 5 March 1998)