

# Gender and Geographic Distribution of Reviewers of Two Leading Suicide Journals

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**Background:** Assessing the gender and geographical distribution of reviewers for journals would help to identify who has the gatekeeper roles. For suicidology journals, no previous research has determined the reviewers' gender and geographical distribution. We aimed to assess the gender and geographical distribution of the reviewers of the leading suicide journals. **Methods:** We collected the list of reviewers, identified gender and country affiliation using an online search. **Results:** Our data included 1,545 responses with 763 reviewers from 48 countries, where the USA (43.7%), Australia (14.6%), and the UK (11.3%) were the leading countries with reviewers in suicide journals. About 95% of the reviewers were affiliated with high-income countries (HICs), and 47.6% were affiliated with institutions in North America. The highest female reviewer presence was noted in Oceania (58.7%) while the lowest was found in South America (0%). The proportion of female reviewers is significantly higher in HICs (52.7%) than in low and middle-income countries (LMICs, 36.1%,  $X^2 = 8.72$ ,  $p = 0.003$ ). **Conclusions:** The gender distribution of reviewers is equal in suicide journals with a slight female dominance (51.8%). There is an extremely low presence of reviewers from LMICs.

**Keywords:** Female; Gender representation; Reviewers; Suicidology; Low and middle-income countries

## Introduction

There is interest currently in the representation of female researchers in many scholarly fields. For example, recent research documents an increasing trend of female researchers as lead authors in psychiatry and mental health journals (Arafat et al., 2025a; Gmeiner et al., 2022; Trimmel et al., 2023). Despite this increasing trend in female researchers in psychiatry research, there has not been much change in the geographic diversity of the researchers (Gmeiner, et al., 2022).

In the field of suicidology in recent years, there has been a significant increase in the number of research publications on who are the researchers in the field of suicidology (Arafat et al., 2025b; Denche-Zamorano et al., 2022; Kendirkiran, 2024; Mohamad Farok & Mahmud, 2023). Mohamad Farok and Mahmud (2023) reported in their analysis that most suicide-related publications were from the USA. The high-income countries (HICs) top the list of suicide-related research publications, and only India and China from the low and middle-income countries (LMICs) got places in the list of the top 15 countries in suicide research (Arafat et al., 2025b). Recent research has examined female representation among prolific researchers, research awards, editors, and lead authorship in suicidology (Stack & Lester, 2024a, 2024b; Arafat et al., 2024; Arafat et al., 2026).

Reviewers play a crucial role in ensuring the quality of academic publications, acting as a gatekeeper in the assessment and enhancement of research integrity. Reviewers serve as critical filters for determining the quality, relevance, and credibility of scholarly work. The absence of thorough and thoughtful reviews can hinder the generation of trustworthy research outputs. To facilitate this process, journals typically reach out to potential reviewers through several established channels, including:

1. Open invitations targeted at individuals who have registered with the journal as either reviewers or authors, allowing for a wider pool of expertise to be engaged.
2. Specific invitations extended to reviewers recommended by authors who submit their research, leveraging the authors' knowledge of suitable experts in the field.
3. Directly reaching to renowned researchers known for their specialization in particular areas of study, ensuring that the review process is informed by highly qualified individuals.

A recent research study has provided insight into the gender and ethnic composition of reviewers in biomedical journals, revealing a striking imbalance; most of the invited reviewers hail from affluent nations (HICs), with a notable 53.1% originating from Europe and 28.8% from North America (Ben Messaoud et al., 2023). This

research also highlighted important trends in gender diversity among those invited to review. However, it is noteworthy that there is a significant gap in published studies examining the gender and ethnic distribution of reviewers specifically within the context of suicide-related journals, indicating an area that warrants further exploration.

The present study in the field of suicidology focuses on the people that the editors of suicide-related journals call on to review articles on suicidal behavior. It focuses on both the representation of male and female reviewers and the countries in which they are located.

## Methods

### Journal selection and list of reviewers

We followed the methodology for choosing the journals mentioned in a previous study (Arafat et al., 2026). We collected the list of reviewers from the websites of two suicidology journals among the suicidology journals: Archives of Suicide Research (ASR) and Crisis (Arafat et al., 2026). Considering the last five years, we collected the list from 2020-2024 for Crisis and 2014-18 for ASR. We attempted to secure the list of reviewers from the leading journals in suicidology with good indexing and long publishing history on suicidal behavior i.e., ASR, Crisis, and Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior (SLTB). However, the list of SLTB was not available publicly. We also attempted to include reviewers in the same timeframe. However, based on the availability we had to consider the different time frame for the two journals.

### Identification of gender and geography

We extracted gender and country affiliation from an online search conducted on university websites, ResearchGate, Google Scholar, and Google. We followed the methods mentioned in previous papers (Arafat et al., 2024, 26). We considered a binary gender structure (i.e., male and female). We categorized the countries based on income following the [World Bank country list](#) and their geographical location in six continents (Africa, Asia, Europe, North America, South America, and Oceania). Hong Kong and Taiwan were considered separate countries in the high-income category. We also categorized the countries based on their location in the World Health Organization (WHO) regions: African Region, Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR), Europe, South-East Asia Region (SEAR), the Americas, and Western Pacific Region (WPR).

### Data analysis

Data were processed and analyzed by Microsoft Excel (version 2013 for Windows). We present descriptive estimates in frequency and percentages. Chi-square test was done to assess the significance in difference between the affiliation of reviewers in HIC and LMICs. We collected data from the public domain and, therefore, we did not seek formal ethical approval for this study.

## Results

Our data included 1,545 responses with 763 reviewers from 48 countries. Among the countries, the USA (43.7%), Australia (14.6%), and the UK (11.3%) were the leading countries with reviewers in suicide journals (Table 1), and China was the only country with an LMIC background featured in the top ten countries.

Table 1: Top ten countries having reviewers in suicide journals (n=1545)

SN	Country	n	%
1	USA	675	43.7
2	Australia	226	14.6
3	UK	174	11.3
4	Canada	57	3.7
5	Israel	35	2.3
6	Austria	34	2.2
7	Italy	30	1.9
8	Germany	26	1.7
9	Belgium	20	1.3
10	China	20	1.3

About 95% of the reviewers were affiliated with HICs, 47.6% were affiliated with institutions in North America, and the fewest were in South America (0.3%). The proportion of female reviewers was significantly higher in HICs (52.7%) than in LMICs (36.1%) ( $X^2 = 8.72$ ,  $p = 0.003$ ). The highest percentage of female reviewers was noted in Oceania (58.7%) and Europe (53.5%), whilst the lowest percentage of female reviewers was found in South America (0%). Similarly, for the WHO regions, the female presence was high in the Western Pacific Region (58.7%), Europe (52.1%), and the Americas (50.1%) (Table 2).

## Discussion

Our analysis revealed the gender distribution is nearly equal with a slight female dominance and an extremely low participation of LMICs as reviewers of suicide journals, while researchers in HICs (in particular the USA, Australia, and the UK) have been contributing greatly. The female dominance was noted in Europe, North America, and Oceania, and the least presence of female reviewers was found in South America. The proportion of female reviewers is significantly higher in HICs than in LMICs ( $p = 0.003$ ). Similar findings were noted in suicidology regarding the geographical distribution of total research, editorial board members, and leading authors (Arafat et al., 2025b; Arafat et al., 2024; Stack and Lester, 2024b; Arafat et al., 2026). Arafat, Kar, and Amin (2024) found that about 3.4% of the editors are affiliated with LMICs, and another study found only 15% of the studies were published from LMICs (Arafat, et al., 2025b). However, the gender distribution revealed variations such as 67.6% of the editors were males (Arafat et al., 2024), 70% of prolific suicidologists were males (Stack & Lester, 2024b), and about 55% of the lead authors were females (Arafat et al., 2026). Again, only 10% of the lead authors were affiliated with LMICs. Nevertheless, Stack and Lester found that research output and awards do not depend on gender (Stack & Lester, 2024a, 2024b).

Table 2: Gender and geographic of reviewers of two leading suicide journals

Journal	Total		Male		Female	
	n	%*	n	%**	n	%**
ASR	571	37.0	267	46.8	304	53.2
Crisis	974	63.0	477	49.0	497	51.0
Total	1545	100.0	744	48.2	801	51.8
<b>Income of the country</b>						
HIC	1462	94.6	691	47.3	771	52.7#
LMIC	83	5.4	53	63.9	30	36.1
<b>Continent</b>						
Africa	11	0.7	7	63.6	4	36.4
Asia	144	9.3	78	54.2	66	45.8
Europe	415	26.9	193	46.5	222	53.5
North America	735	47.6	364	49.5	371	50.5
Oceania	235	15.2	97	41.3	138	58.7
South America	5	0.3	5	100.0	0	0.0
<b>WHO Region</b>						
African Region	8	0.5	6	75.0	2	25.0
EMR	15	1.0	13	86.7	2	13.3
Europe	455	29.4	218	47.9	237	52.1
South-East Asia	24	1.6	13	54.2	11	45.8
the Americas	740	47.9	369	49.9	371	50.1
WPR	303	19.6	125	41.3	178	58.7

\*percentage of row values; \* percentage of column values; # statistically significant,  $p < 0.05$ ; ASR-Archives of Suicide Research, HIC- High Income Country; LMIC- Low- and Middle-Income Country, EMR- Eastern Mediterranean Region, SEAR- South-East Asia Region, WPR- Western Pacific Region

The lack of reviewers from LMICs is noteworthy, and it is important to change this. Possible solutions to get more researchers in LMICs interested and active in suicidology include having more international conferences on suicidal behavior in those countries, finding more ways in which researchers in HICs can collaborate with researchers in LMIC countries, and for suicidology journals to accept more articles for publication from LMIC researchers. Suicidology needs attention to the increased participation of researchers from LMICs as about

three-fourths of the suicides happen in these countries and there are disparities on research out-put and participation in review and editorial process (Arafat et al., 2024; Arafat et al., 2026; Arafat et al., 2025b; Arafat and Lester, 2025; World Health Organization, 2025).

This analysis has several limitations. First, the list of reviewers was extracted from only two journals, and the timeline was also different, for Crisis (2020-24) and for ASR (2014-18). Second, we excluded reviewers from other journals publishing papers on suicide. Third, we considered only a single affiliation while some scholars have multiple affiliations. Fourth, we ascertained gender and affiliation by searching online information (ResearchGate, Google Scholar, and available online photos), which may have introduced bias. Finally, we used a binary gender classification of gender.

### Conclusions

The gender distribution of reviewers for suicidology journals is roughly equal, with a slight female dominance. However, there is an extremely low presence of reviewers from LMICs. The gender distribution varied by country, and the geographical distribution is notable. LMICs incur the three-fourths of the worldwide suicide burden, with negligible research participation and contribution to the management of the suicidology scholarly journals.

### Funding

None

### Availability of Data

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author, S.M. Yasir Arafat.

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