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GENERAL RADIOLOGY

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Letter to the Editor: On the role of mentorship, ethics, and quality in publication success

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Dear Editor,

I read with great interest the article entitled "Bibliometric analysis of radiology residency theses in Türkiye: publication metrics and trends" by Salbas and Koc[1], published in Diagnostic and Interventional Radiology. This comprehensive bibliometric analysis makes a valuable contribution to the field by elucidating the potential of radiology residency theses in Türkiye to be transformed into academic publications and by identifying factors that influence this process.

Among the study's findings, one observation that particularly drew my attention and merits deeper academic discussion is that publications in which the first author was not a resident were more frequently published in Science Citation Index – Expanded indexed journals (50.8% vs. 74.7%), received a higher number of citations (2 vs. 17), and had a shorter time to publication (1,430 vs. 916 days). As the authors also imply, this finding may initially be attributed to the greater experience of mentors in academic writing, journal selection, and navigation of the publication process.

Consistent with these findings, the literature has reported strong associations between experienced mentorship and successful scholarly output. For example, in postgraduate year one research projects, the presence of mentors with at least one first-author publication was associated with a significantly higher rate of full-text publication than with projects lacking such mentorship (50.0% vs. 8.6%, $P < 0.001$).[2] This finding underscores the importance of conceptualizing mentorship not merely as a product-oriented endeavor but as an educational process. Furthermore, the involvement of mentors or senior research collaborators has been shown to increase the likelihood that resident research projects progress to publication.[3] Conversely, insufficient mentorship during the research process has been associated with inadequate academic skill development and the emergence of substantial barriers throughout the publication process.[4]

However, interpreting this result solely through the lens of experience may risk overlooking an important opportunity with respect to one of the core objectives of residency training: the cultivation of independent researchers. An ideal mentorship relationship should not merely involve the supervisor using their experience to expedite publication but should also encompass the transfer of this experience to the resident, thereby fostering their development as a competent researcher. The residency thesis represents the most critical practical training through which a resident experiences the entire scientific research process from conception to completion. Assuming first authorship of the resulting manuscript constitutes one of the most essential components of this educational process.

This finding invites a broader discussion regarding the ethical and educational dimensions of mentorship in residency training. In this context, it is important to distinguish between productivity-oriented mentorship, which prioritizes rapid publication and journal impact, and educational or guided mentorship, which emphasizes resident-led authorship, skill acquisition in scientific writing, data interpretation, and independent scholarly development.[5,6] Although the former may optimize short-term bibliometric outcomes, the latter aligns more closely with the core educational mission of residency training. Similarly, a study examining

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the publication profiles of dermatology residency graduates demonstrated that the total number of publications, the number of first-author publications during residency, and h-index values were positively associated with graduates' propensity to pursue academic medicine and with indicators of long-term scholarly productivity.[7] In particular, graduates who chose academic career paths had significantly higher numbers of both total publications and first-author publications during residency, suggesting that first authorship may serve as a marker of sustained scientific productivity throughout an academic career.

The residency thesis represents the most comprehensive opportunity for trainees to experience the full scientific process, from research design to manuscript submission and revision. First authorship of the resulting publication is a critical educational milestone within this process. Therefore, the systematically lower performance of resident-first-authored publications observed in the study may reflect not only differences in experience but also a potential gap in structured mentorship and academic training. If supervisors assume primary responsibility for manuscript writing to accelerate acceptance or improve journal ranking, residents may be inadvertently deprived of essential opportunities to develop writing proficiency, journal selection skills, and confidence in responding to peer review.

From this perspective, the findings reported by Salbas and Koc[1] extend beyond bibliometric description and prompt reflection on how mentorship practices are structured within training institutions. To address this issue, several practical strategies may be considered: (i) implementation of structured writing mentorship programs in which supervisors provide feedback on resident-drafted manuscripts; (ii) allocation of writing time during the final year of residency; and (iii) explicit institutional expectations favoring resident-led first authorship, when appropriate. Such measures may help balance publication quality with the educational objectives of residency training. Ultimately, the goal should not be limited to maximizing publication metrics but should also include the cultivation of independent physicians equipped with strong scientific reasoning and academic writing skills. Future bibliometric studies incorporating qualitative assessments of mentorship practices may further clarify the distinction between productive supervision and genuine educational mentorship.

I would like to express once again my appreciation to the authors for their work addressing an important issue in radiology residency training.

Conflict of interest disclosure

The author declared no conflicts of interest.

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