

Exploring perceptions and attitudes toward Open Access among medical researchers at the University of Ljubljana

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Abstract

Introduction and aims. Open Access (OA) policies are in the process of being established in Slovenia at the national and university level. An important milestone was reached in September 2015 by adopting the National Strategy for Open Access to Scientific Publications and Research Data in Slovenia 2015-2020. Furthermore, the Slovenian Research Agency is expected to introduce its policy on OA in 2016. The necessary infrastructure to support and sustain OA publishing is currently under development. Advocating OA has become one of the crucial goals at the Central Medical Library of the Faculty of Medicine, University of Ljubljana. The Library has recently created an OA guide in Libguides in order to contribute to this objective. The aim of this study was to explore perceptions and attitudes toward OA among medical researchers affiliated with the University, to identify their needs and assess the usability of the OA guide.

Methods. A survey was conducted among medical researchers at the Faculty of Medicine within the University of Ljubljana. A link to an anonymous online questionnaire was sent to 300 researchers. The survey questions were organized into different sections referring to the participants' familiarity and attitude towards OA, their publishing practices, their understanding of predatory publishers/journals and finally the researchers' expectations about the Library's support on OA.

Results. A total of 20 (7%) respondents completed the survey. Their familiarity with OA in general is fair, however they are poorly acquainted with the National Strategy of OA, the University of Ljubljana's institutional repository and Horizon 2020 Open Access requirements. They think that the most important advantages of OA are increased readership, more citations and greater visibility of their publications, while the most important disadvantages are publication charges. Journal impact factor is considered to be the most important criterion in selecting a journal for publication. The majority of the participants have published between 0 and 3 OA articles in the last five years. Respondents' research funders have not imposed any requirements in regard to OA publishing. The researchers are poorly to fairly familiar with predatory publishers/journals and misleading metrics. Most of them think the Library's OA guide is partially appropriate in terms of its extent, usability and the organization of information. They expect the Library to help them staying current with OA literature and choosing the right journal for submitting an article. The appropriate training should be included as well.

Discussion and conclusions. Due to low response rate, the results bring limited information on researchers' current level of awareness and knowledge about OA including their experience with OA publishing. Nevertheless, the survey has revealed that medical researchers need effective information support about OA issues from the Library. The Library has to improve the LibGuides guide and enhance its promotion and supporting activities for OA. This is the first survey exploring the views of Slovenian academic medical researchers on OA. Further studies on this subject should be done when OA policies are established at the national level.

Key words: Open Access Publishing; Slovenia; Research Personnel; Universities; Biomedical Research; Libraries, Medical.

Introduction and aims

Open Access (OA) in Slovenia is in its development stage at the national and university level. The Slovenian OA infrastructure with four institutional repositories and a national portal was established in 2013(1). The National Strategy for Open Access to Scientific Publications and Research Data in Slovenia 2015-2020 was adopted in 2015, in accordance with the recommendations of the European Commission(2). In line with the strategy, the Slovenian Research Agency is expected to adopt a mandate for mandatory OA publishing of publicly funded research projects in 2016. The Central Medical Library (CML) of the Faculty of Medicine, University of Ljubljana (FM UL) found advocating OA one of its most crucial goals. The CML has recently created an OA guide using LibGuides in order to support OA publishing of the faculty. This study was conducted to give an insight into medical researchers' perceptions and attitudes toward OA, to identify their needs regarding information on OA and assess the usability of the OA guide.

Methods

CML conducted a survey among researchers at the FM UL between January 13-23, 2016. An online questionnaire was created on SurveyMonkey (<https://www.surveymonkey.net/>) and a link to it was sent to all 300 researchers. They were asked 21 questions regarding their demographics, familiarity with OA, attitudes toward OA, publishing practices, familiarity with predatory publishers/journals and expectations about the CML's support on OA. The questionnaire contained different types of survey questions – open-ended questions, multiple-choice questions and interval scale questions (5-point Likert scale).

Results

The survey was completed by 20 respondents, which represents some 7% of medical researchers at the FM UL.

Demographic profile of respondents

By age group, the sample includes 70% researchers aged 36-55 years, 20% researchers older than 55 years and 10% researchers aged below 36 years. By academic rank, the sample comprises 60% associate and full professors, 25% assistant professors, 10% assistants and 5% researchers. The sample includes a high percentage (75%) of female respondents.

Familiarity with OA

The results on researchers' familiarity with OA are presented in Figure 1.

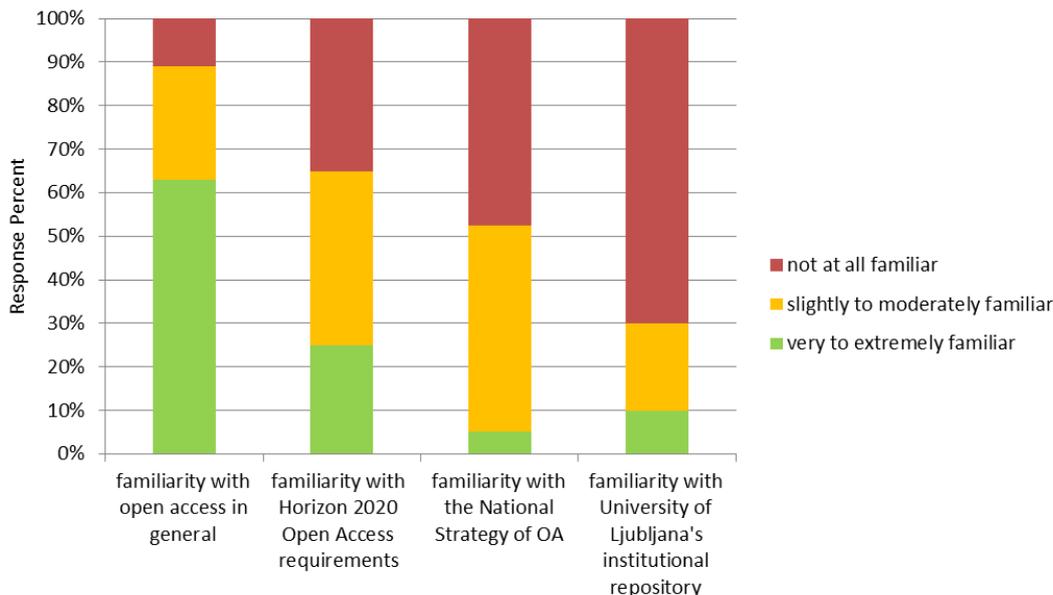


Figure 1. Researchers' familiarity with OA.

Most respondents (75%) replied that they know at least one OA journal.

Researchers use OA articles for research or educational purposes on a weekly (50%), monthly (20%) and yearly basis (10%).

Attitude towards OA

Respondents were asked to select one or more advantages and disadvantages of OA that they find the most important. They agree that OA offers various advantages such as increased readership (95%), more citations (75%) and greater visibility of a researcher (55%). However, they have serious concerns regarding publishing in OA (Figure 2).

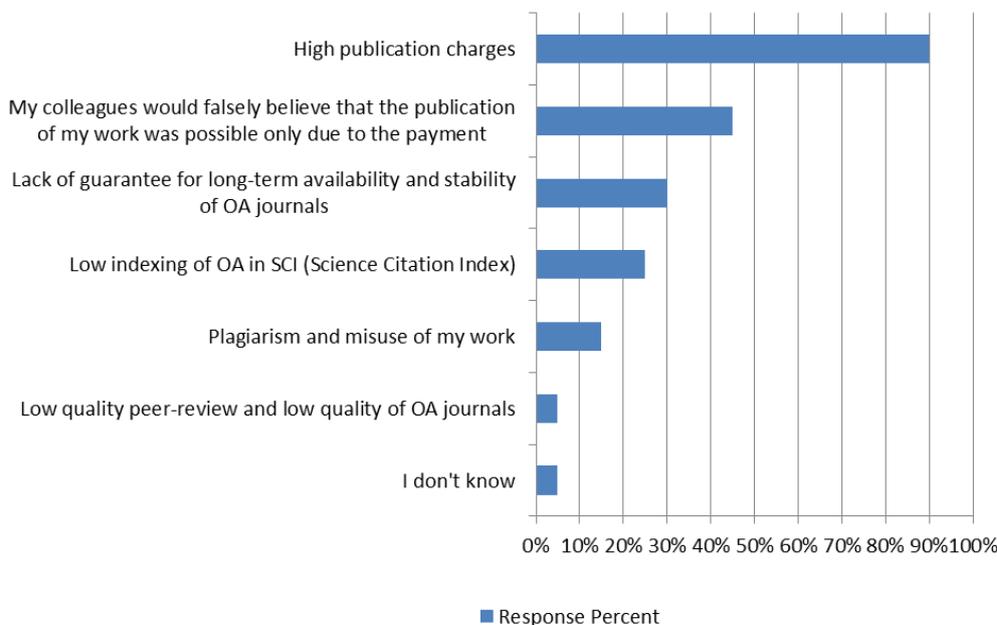


Figure 2: Researchers' opinions on obstacles regarding publishing in OA.

Publishing practices of medical researchers

Researchers find journal impact factor (90%), publisher's reputation (63%) and time of publication process (52%) as important to very important criteria in selecting a journal for publication. Only 25% of respondents recognize the importance of OA journals selection, others think this is partially important (55%) or unimportant (20%).

The main reasons that would encourage researchers to publish in OA are presented in Figure 3. Respondents could select more than one answer.

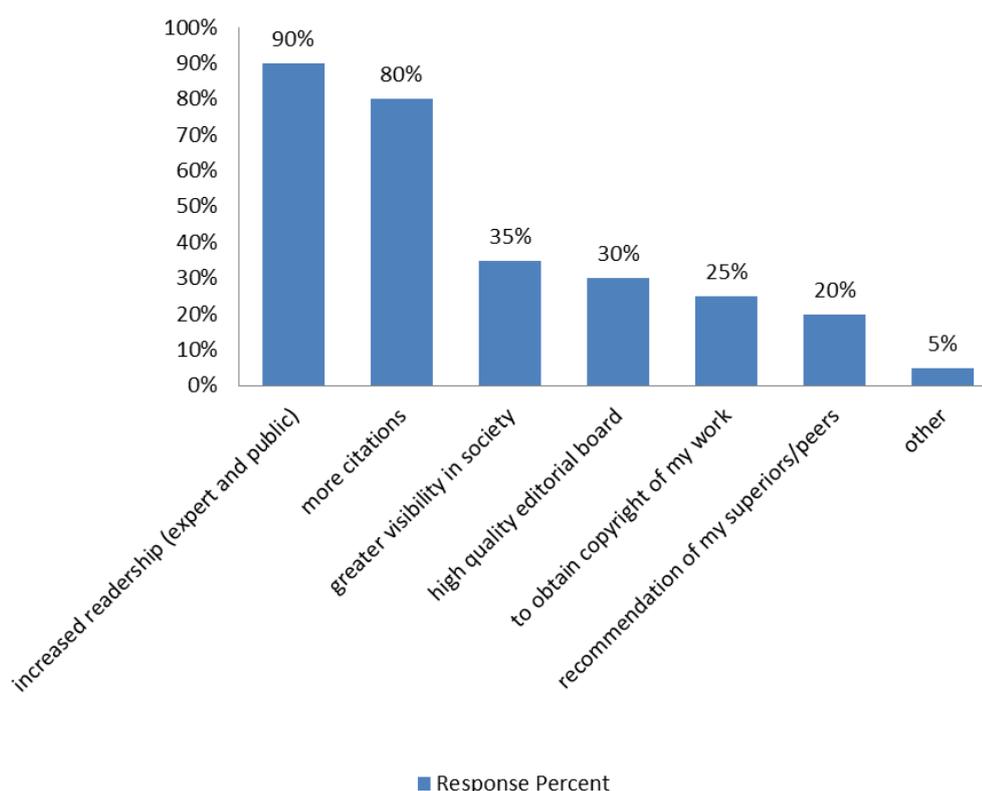


Figure 3: Main reasons that would encourage researchers to publish in OA.

Participants were highly productive in terms of number of published scientific research papers in the last 5 years, since 75% of them published seven or more articles. However 30% of participants did not publish any articles in OA in this time period, 40% published one to three OA articles, 10% four to six OA articles and only 15% seven or more OA articles (green or gold OA).

The majority of researchers (65%) responded that their research funders have not imposed any requirements in regard to OA publishing, 10% confirmed the existence of such requirements and 25% were not aware of the funder's policy.

Familiarity with predatory publishers and journals

A quarter of respondents are very to extremely familiar with predatory publishers/journals, 55% of them are slightly to moderately familiar with them and 20% have not heard of this issue before. Acquaintance with misleading metrics is lower. Only 17% think they are very to extremely familiar with it, a third (33%) of respondents are slightly to moderately familiar with it and 50% of them have not heard of it before. Almost all respondents (80%) have received an e-mail invitation from predatory publisher/journal to contribute an article or book chapter for publication, but they all ignore this kind of invitations.

Researchers' expectations about the CML's support on OA

Respondents expect various forms of support regarding many different aspects of OA from the CML (Figure 4). They also shared their opinions on CML's OA guide (Figure 5) and suggested additional content to be added to the guide: a list of OA journals with journal impact factors (sorted by scientific categories) and exact requirements of Slovenian Research Agency regarding OA publishing.

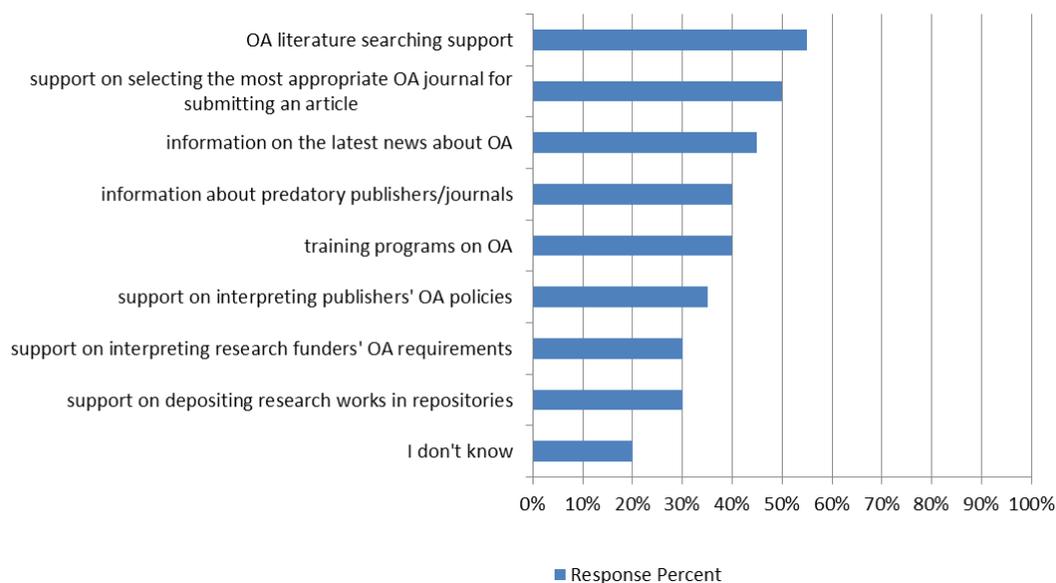


Figure 4. Researchers' expectations about the CML's support on OA.

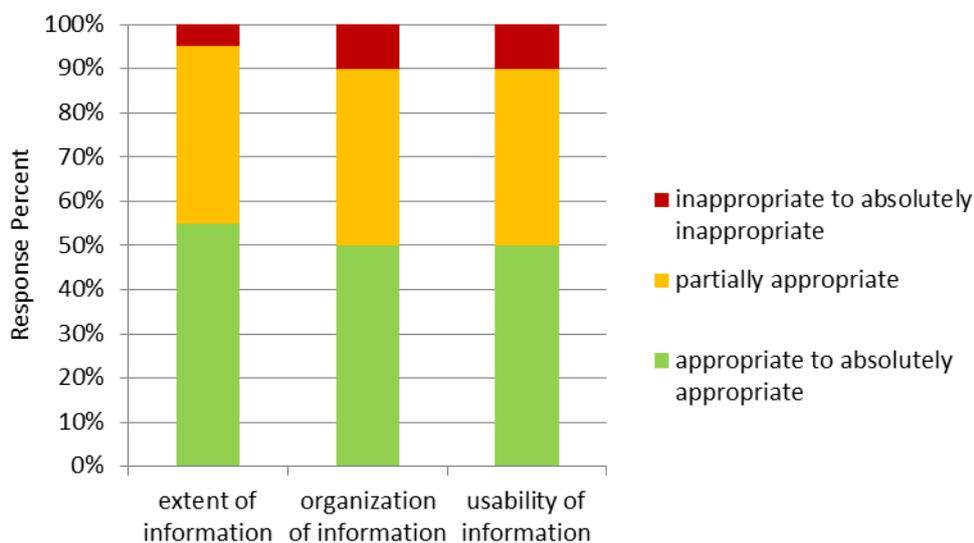


Figure 5: Researchers' opinion on extent, organization and usability of information included in CML's OA Libguides guide.

Discussion and conclusions

Due to low response rate, small sample size and overrepresentation of associate and full professors in the sample, the results provide limited information on researchers' current level of awareness and knowledge about OA including their experience with OA publishing. It is presumed that only researchers that have at least some experience with OA participated in the survey. Nevertheless, the results indicate that OA publishing is currently in the process of establishing itself among medical researchers at the FM UL. It is evident that the funder's OA mandate has an important impact on the extent of OA publishing. However, financial reasons are also present. Researchers' knowledge on OA publishing issues corresponds with the development of OA in Slovenia. It is interesting though, that researchers regularly use OA articles for their work, are familiar with OA journals and they agree that OA publishing brings a lot of benefits. The study revealed what kind of support from CML is the most important for researchers. Accordingly, the CML will prepare a plan of activities and usability enhancement of OA guide to overcome barriers to a better understanding of OA and OA publishing of the faculty.

This is the first survey exploring the views of Slovenian academic medical researchers on OA. In recent years, several similar studies were conducted throughout Europe (3-6). Our findings roughly correspond with those of previously published data. It would be necessary to carry out further studies on this subject after Slovenian Research Agency adopts a mandate for mandatory OA publishing from publicly funded research projects.

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