NON-SCI SUBJECT VISIBILITY OF THE LATIN AMERICAN SCIENTIFIC PRODUCTION IN THE HEALTH FIELD*

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The purpose of this work was to analyse the non-Science Citation Index subject visibility of the Latin American production in the health field. The methodology used considered manual and automated retrieval of the Latin American journals, as covered by different conventional secondary sources. The IMLA/LILACS (Index Medicus Latinoamericano/Latin American Literature in the Health Sciences) database was used to obtain a master list of the "sustained" journals for the period 1979-1990. The selected journals were classified by subject content, following the scheme of the U.S. National Library of Medicine. A total of 221 journals were selected and a database was developed. The results corroborated the leadership of Brazil in the field. It was also found that the subject content had a strong trend toward the "clinical", medicine field. The subject "Medicine" was head in the list, with seventy four journals. Several difficulties and barriers to the use of the IMLA/LILACS database were detected. The implications of the overall analysis of this study as affecting researchers, policy makers and data-base producers are stressed by the author.

Introduction

The Latin American proportion of Science Citation Index (SCI) articles has remained constant at one percent for approximately twenty years. Other indexing services such as Chemical Abstracts and Physics Abstracts report similar proportions.1 Frame2 on the other hand, has reported that Latin American science in general is concentrated in the life sciences. He found that while 60% of the world literature was in the life sciences, in Latin America it accounted for 73%.

A regional study3 indicated that the seven Latin American countries that highly represented the major biomedical journal production were the following, in descending order: Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, Chile, Venezuela, Cuba, and Colombia. These countries contributed with 91.04% of the total production in the region, in 1987.

The dissemination of this productivity as indexed by major secondary sources in 1987, was the following, in descending order: Index Medicus Latinoamericano (IMLA) covered 235 journals; Biological Abstracts, 93; Excerpta Medica, 82; Chemical Abstracts, 56; Index Medicus, 47; and Science Citation Index, 11. These results showed that over 60% of the Latin American production was not disseminated outside the region. Clearly, the little inter-citation between Latin American scientists, as reported by Garfield\textsuperscript{4} is a reflection of the scarce representation of Latin America in SCI and other conventional secondary information sources.

While some studies have been conducted to explore citedness in Latin America,\textsuperscript{5,6} more research needs to be done both, nationally and internationally, so as to understand regional patterns of scientific communication.

By examining the journals that published Latin American research, we can obtain an idea of the productivity of science by country. Scientific fields can be easily detected and classified. However, analysis of field distributions are too broad to give us an idea of the specific subjects of research.

It is useful to know how many journals are dedicated to life sciences for example, but it is more relevant to know what disciplines within this field are dominant in each Latin American country. Is it biomedicine?, clinical medicine?, socio-medicine?, etc. Furthermore, it is highly relevant to know what specific research lines are addressed within these disciplines, and what collaboration networks exist within disciplines and within Latin American countries.

Up to date, most of the research performed in this field has been carried out through the use of SCI or other conventional indexing sources, with the obvious limitations of journal and country coverage. No studies have been conducted through the analysis and use of local or regional information sources.

**Purpose of the work**

The purpose of this work is to report the results of a research in progress on the scientific productivity of Latin American researchers in the health field, as analysed through existing local/regional information sources. At this stage of the project, only the results regarding the subject visibility are provided.