

A survey of IJE Education Corner use and impact

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The International Journal of Epidemiology (IJE) Education Corner was introduced in 2012,¹ providing educational articles on epidemiologic concepts and methods. We conducted a survey of the use and impact of the IJE Education Corner articles in relation to teaching, research, and practice, collating suggestions on how we might increase their utility.

Questions for the Survey were developed iteratively by the Education Corner Editors and IJE editorial staff. A 29-item online survey, using REDCap, was administered between 11th November 2021 and 14th January 2022, using mailing lists of the International Journal of Epidemiology Editorial Board, the International Epidemiology Association, and the World Congress of Epidemiology. The survey link was also posted on Twitter using @IntJEpidemiol, and the hashtags #epitwitter #statstwitter. We used mixed methods to analyse the results, with descriptive statistics for quantitative data, and content analysis for qualitative data including free-text answers.²

We received 213 responses from an estimated 2000 people invited to undertake the survey (response rate approximately 11%). Of respondents, 56% (120) self-identified as male, 43% (92) as female, and 1% (1) as other. Respondents were from 54 countries, and their mean age was 46.4 years. Most had a PhD, DPhil, DSc or ScD in public health or epidemiology (64%) and worked in an academic role in teaching and/or research (82%) (Table 1).

Of the 213 respondents, 43% (91) said that they had used IJE Education Corner articles in their teaching, research, or practice: 24% (52) used Education Corner articles specifically in their teaching (45 in epidemiology courses), 33% (70) in their research, and 10% (22) in their public health/clinical practice (Table 2). We also found that Education Corner articles are used in teaching, research, and practice across all regions of the world (Table 2).

Many respondents had used at least two Education Corner articles in their teaching or research, with basic epidemiological study designs the most popular topic. For example, the top two articles selected by respondents for use in teaching and research were ‘Classification of epidemiological study designs’³ and ‘Case–control studies: basic concepts’.⁴ Other popular articles included introductions to epidemiological concepts and methods, such as ‘Mediation analysis in epidemiology: methods, interpretation, and bias’⁵ and ‘Competing risks in epidemiology: possibilities and pitfalls’.⁶ These and other articles that survey respondents reported using are shown in Supplementary Table S1.

Respondents who did not use IJE Education Corner articles in their teaching, research or practice provided suggestions for increasing their engagement with articles (Supplementary Table S2). Many expressed their lack of awareness of IJE Education Corner articles but a willingness to use them in the future.

“I was not aware of this resource...I may use them in the future now that I am aware”

“I don’t teach classes, but plan to check it out to help support HDR [higher degree by research] students. I just didn’t know it existed”

Given this lack of familiarity with the Education Corner, respondents also suggested that there was a need for increased promotion and accessibility of Education Corner articles.

“Email reminders of the release of issues, with a table of contents, may motivate me to read the education corner and use it in my teaching”

“An index of articles so I can easily identify them”

“I think it needs to be better publicised on the webpage and in social media”

Respondents also indicated that they would be more likely to use Education Corner articles if topics were relevant to their work. Some indicated that papers covering foundational epidemiology would be most useful to them, while others wanted papers covering more advanced epidemiological concepts, or specific topics more applicable to their area of work.

“I think the articles are very good, but I mostly teach undergraduate medical students, so the articles are too advanced”

“Some more basic concepts would be good for foundation level students

“Wider scope from basic to advanced”

“Educational topics of comprehensive and state-of-the-art subjects”

“Case studies for teaching epidemiological research from diverse contexts, especially community settings”

“Methodology on environmental epidemiology, especially climate change and health research”

“Free [Education Corner] full texts from research in developing countries”

These survey data have formed part of an evaluation of Education Corner by a team of IJE editors, and inform the expanded vision for the Education Corner, outlined in the accompanying Editorial.⁷ In particular, we have changed the format in the hope of increasing accessibility and encouraging uptake of both basic and advanced methods. We will also be increasing outreach to under-represented voices at all career stages. We plan to continue to grow Education Corner for those learning about and using epidemiology wherever they are in the world, as a contribution to the health of populations.

Ethics approval: This negligible risk study was assessed by The University of Sydney Human Research Ethics Office and exempt from formal ethical review.

Data availability: available on request.

Supplementary data: Supplementary data are available at IJE online.

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