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The fate of rejected manuscripts: a cross-sectional assessment of different biomedical disciplines

Objective

This study aims to evaluate the fate of rejected manuscripts in different biomedical disciplines after resubmission to other journals.

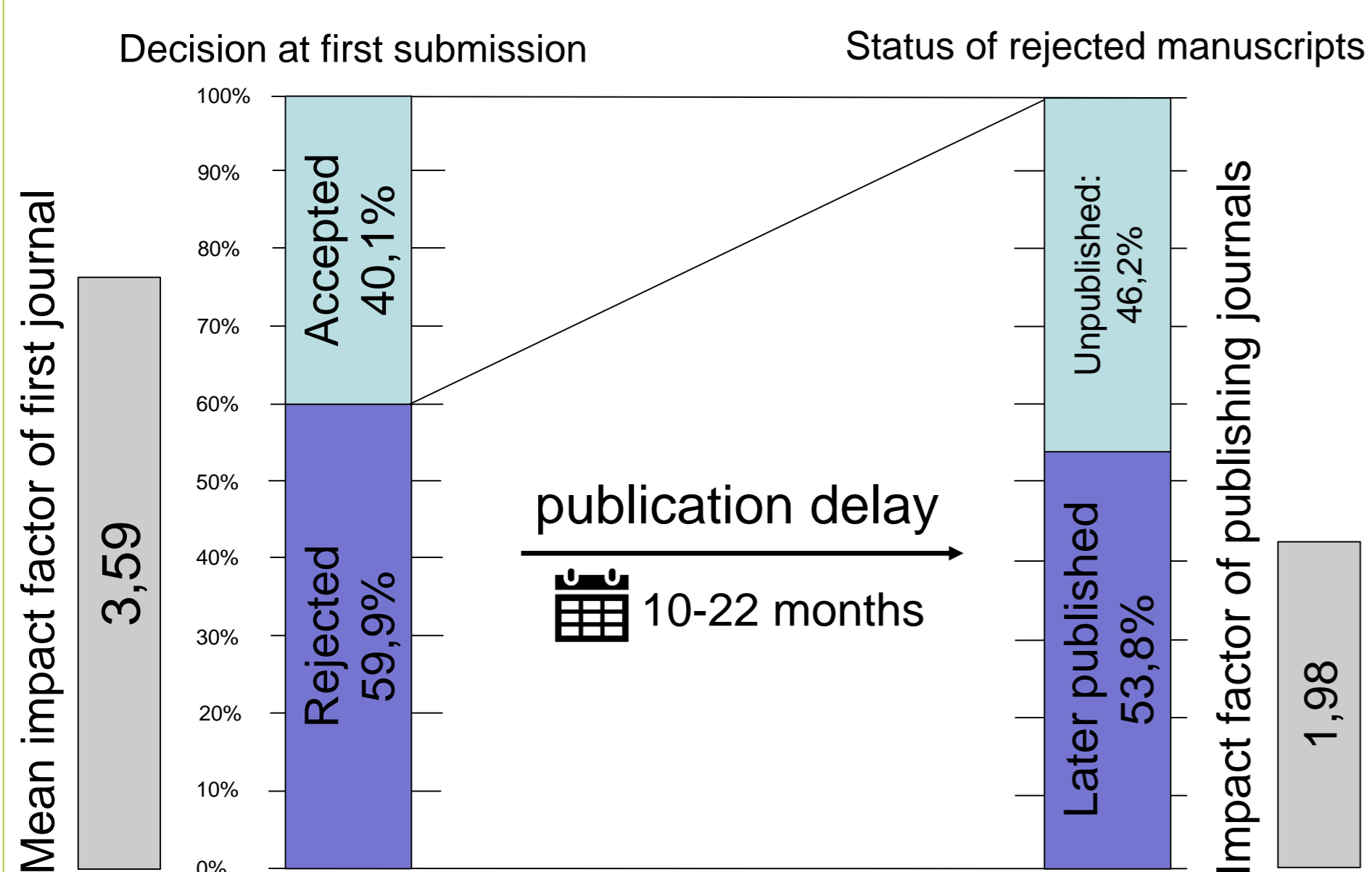
Methods

A search of the PubMed database was conducted on August 15, 2023 to identify relevant articles. The following keywords/Boolean operators were applied to the database: "rejected manuscript" OR "rejected manuscripts" OR "rejected articles" OR "rejected papers". Further articles were sought from the reference lists of the included articles. Article characteristics, quality measures, and data regarding manuscript rejection and further publication were extracted.

Results

Of the initial 95 articles found in PubMed, 24 were included in the study, with an additional nine articles found in the reference lists (total of 33). The average rejection rate for all biomedical disciplines was approximately 60% (mean=0.59; median=0.66; SD=0.21, IQR=0.3). "Original articles" were the most commonly rejected. Little over half of the manuscripts initially rejected (mean= 0.54; median= 0.55; SD= 0.19; IQR= 0.25) were subsequently published, typically after 16 months (mean= 16.02; median= 15.5; SD= 3.53; IQR= 4.42). The mean impact factor (IF) of the journal to which the articles were first submitted was 3.59 (median = 2.52, SD = 2.42, IQR = 2.05), whereas the IF of the journals that ultimately published the articles was lower (provided mean: mean = 1.97, median = 1.8, SD = 0.55, IQR = 0.50 // provided median: mean = 1.61, median = 1.57, SD = 0.50, IQR = 0.86). The quality of the included studies has room for improvement. Nine articles (27%) reported a possible COI, and eight (24%) provided information on sponsorship. None of the studies were registered, provided a research protocol, defined eligibility criteria, trained selection, and data extraction beforehand nor performed selection in duplicate. Only one study (3%) reported data extraction in duplicate. Based on limited data, the three most prevalent reasons for rejection were lack of novelty, methodological flaws and not fitting the scope of the journal

Fate of rejected manuscripts



Conclusion

Manuscript rejection is a common occurrence, and not all manuscripts are subsequently published. Rejected manuscripts are commonly published in journals with an IF lower than the IF of the journals of the first submission.