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EDITORIAL

IJED Support for Eating Disorders Research in the Time of COVID-19

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Abstract

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This editorial reports on an anonymous survey question posed to eating disorders researchers about changes the International Journal of Eating Disorders (IJED) should implement to support the eating disorders research community affected by COVID-19. The editorial accompanies an IJED article that details responses to the larger survey focusing more broadly on COVID-19-related research disruptions. Survey invitations were sent to editorial board members of eating disorders journals, members of eating disorder scientific organizations (e.g., Eating Disorders Research Society), and individuals who provided at least three IJED reviews in the prior 12 months. We reviewed the responses of 187 participants and identified three categories of changes that: a) had already been implemented by the journal; b) cannot be implemented because they fall outside the scope of IJED; or c) will be implemented in coming weeks/months. The latter category includes publishing topical COVID-19 papers, making some COVID-19-related content available open access, revising statistical guidelines, and issuing author guidance on reporting protocol changes caused by COVID-19-related disruptions. IJED recognizes the disruptive impacts that COVID-19 has on all activities in our field, including clinical work, teaching, and advocacy, and is committed to supporting authors during this difficult time while striving to publish high-quality research.

Keywords: eating disorders; COVID-19; coronavirus; registered report; scientific review; scientific research

1 The 2019 outbreak of the novel coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 (“COVID-19”) has
2 caused major disruptions across the world, and the field of eating disorders, of course,
3 has not been immune to the sequelae. Inpatient or residential treatment services have
4 had to institute major safety measures for staff and patients and most outpatient
5 services have transitioned to delivering care via telehealth approaches. In the wake of
6 the coronavirus pandemic, research institutions around the world have had to shut down
7 laboratories and research offices involved in “non-essential” research to protect the
8 research teams, their research participants, and the public from the spread of the
9 infection. A recent Lancet Psychiatry editorial noted “In times of crisis, research might
10 seem a low priority”, but the author then went on to underscore the vital importance of
11 both initiating new studies specific to the pandemic and continuing existing lines of
12 research (Editor, 2020). Research is needed to document and understand the full range
13 of COVID-19-related disruptions on our field, and such efforts will benefit from attention
14 to work in the mental health field more generally (Holmes et al., 2020). This editorial
15 focuses on one facet: disruptions of eating disorders research.

16 While it is too soon to measure the longer-term impact of these closures on
17 research programs and the people designing and executing the studies, already there is
18 a growing literature anticipating impacts, sharing best practices for how to continue
19 scientific work, and contemplating strategies to mitigate adverse effects (Servick, Cho,
20 Guglielmi, Vogel, & Couzin-Frankel, 2020; Van Bavel, 2020; Yan, 2020). Scientific
21 journals have an important place in the research ecosystem: they set quality standards
22 or expectations for scientific rigor; they reflect, and at times, set trends for topics worth
23 researching; and they provide a major platform for publishing scientific findings. Given

1 that publications are the “coin of the realm” for academics, journals play an important
2 role in researchers’ careers. The International Journal of Eating Disorders (IJED) and
3 members of its board long have embraced an author-centric ethos to maintain policies
4 and practices that support authors (e.g., short review times; detailed and high-quality
5 feedback; a range of manuscript types suitable for investigators across levels of
6 research experience; workshops on publishing; and outreach to early career scholars).

7 Considering the extraordinary challenges brought on by the outbreak of COVID-
8 19, the IJED Executive Committee (i.e., the Editor and Associate Editors) invited
9 colleagues in the eating disorders field to share their experiences and concerns
10 occasioned by the COVID-19-related disruptions, their thoughts about effective
11 strategies for continuing research during the pandemic, and their suggestions of what
12 the eating disorders community and IJED could do to support research during and
13 beyond the crisis. Specifically, in April 2020, we sent survey invitations to editorial board
14 members of three eating disorder journals (IJED, Journal of Eating Disorders, European
15 Eating Disorders Review); members of the Eating Disorders Research Society;
16 members of the Special Interest Group for Early Career Investigators of the Academy
17 for Eating Disorders; and ad-hoc IJED reviewers who had provided at least 3 reviews in
18 that past 12 months. Recipients were encouraged to share the survey link with other
19 colleagues. We received 187 surveys with sufficiently complete data to permit
20 examination. Detailed survey findings are described in a separate report (Weissman,
21 Klump, & Rose, in press), except for responses to the question which is the focus of this
22 editorial: “Please describe 1-3 changes IJED should make to support eating disorders
23 researchers during and after COVID-19.”

1 There were 175 comments in response to this item. This editorial gives an
2 account of our respondents' suggestions and how IJED is responding to these
3 suggestions. We each independently read these comments and then, as a group,
4 considered which suggestions should be implemented. Our goal was to identify any
5 proposed changes (even if mentioned by only one person) that we believe hold promise
6 to accomplish the IJED's overarching goal of supporting authors and the field. Our
7 responses to the findings are organized into three categories: 1. Changes that were
8 suggested that IJED has already implemented; 2. changes that were suggested and
9 reasons why they cannot be implemented; and 3. changes we are working toward
10 implementing.

11 Currently Implemented Initiatives

12 The following policies currently are in effect:

13 a. Longer/more flexible timeframes for authors needing to submit revisions. Authors
14 who are invited to revise their manuscript after review are advised of standard IJED
15 revision deadlines (90 days for major revisions and 30 days for minor revisions), but
16 they are also invited to contact the editor for an extension, if needed.

17 b. Longer/more flexible submission deadlines for reviewers. Messages inviting
18 reviewers to evaluate original or revised manuscripts currently include a statement
19 acknowledging that, due to COVID-19, reviewers may need more time than usual for
20 providing an evaluation. Reviewers accepting a review assignment are advised that
21 automated messages will continue to indicate a default turn-around of 14 days.

22 However, deadlines are adjusted per reviewer request or, if reviewers ask for more than
23 4 weeks, the editor selects an alternative reviewer.

1 c. Fast-tracking of COVID-19-related studies. From submission to production, we
 2 are speeding up the handling of COVID-19-related manuscripts (as we do with other
 3 time-sensitive material). During the review stage, this means that editors will select
 4 reviewers who agree to the default review deadline of 14 days or less; authors are
 5 asked to agree to expedited resubmission deadlines as well, if possible.

6 d. Conduct a study of COVID-19's impact on eating disorders research. Our survey
 7 (Weissman et al., in press) represents our effort on behalf of the IJED to gain an initial
 8 sense of the pandemic's impact on eating disorders research. However, we invite our
 9 colleagues to pursue such research with an expanded focus regarding the domains to
 10 be examined and the timeframe for measuring impacts which, likely, will be long-term.

11 e. Accept on-line data collection versus in-person collection. IJED does not have an
 12 a priori prohibition against online data collection; the critical issue with any data
 13 collection approach is whether the sample is suitable for addressing the research
 14 question and whether the data were collected using reliable and valid approaches.
 15 Thus, we welcome high-quality studies that use on-line platforms to expand our
 16 knowledge about eating disorders.

17 f. Maintain standards for publication. We appreciate respondents' concern that we
 18 maintain our expectations for scientific rigor. IJED has a dedicated editorial board
 19 comprised of experts committed to upholding expectations of high quality and being
 20 knowledgeable of up-to-date research methodology.

21 Changes Respondents Suggested and Reasons Why They Cannot be Implemented

- 1 a. Special issue on COVID-19. IJED welcomes COVID-19-related content, and we
2 currently will fast-track such papers. We do not want to delay publishing time-sensitive
3 content while awaiting enough papers to complete an entire issue.
- 4 b. Increase the number of manuscripts published, particularly reviews, “idea”
5 manuscripts, brief reports. IJED no longer has an a priori limit of manuscripts that can
6 be published, and the overall number of published manuscripts has gone up in recent
7 years. That said, we do not anticipate a policy change toward a substantial increase in
8 papers for the sake of an increase. We aspire to publish manuscripts that advance the
9 scientific knowledge base needed to understand, prevent, and treat eating disorders
10 and improve the lives of the people and communities affected by eating disorders.
- 11 c. Publish the proceedings of eating disorders conferences. Often, conference
12 abstracts are based on partially completed studies or, less frequently, on research
13 already submitted for publication. Moreover, conference proceedings typically do not
14 provide enough information for readers to evaluate scientific rigor. We note that authors
15 have a new option for publishing their research plans with IJED in the form of registered
16 reports (for a recent example, see (Manasse et al., 2020)). We encourage IJED authors
17 to make use of the registered report format, particularly during the COVID-19 period
18 when data collection may be stalled or halted.
- 19 d. Relax the rigor and reproducibility standards for data collection occurring during
20 COVID-19. Although we will develop guidelines for how to report and evaluate COVID-
21 19 disruptions (see below), we will not be using different evidentiary standards, as doing
22 so would compromise the quality of data published in IJED and the quality of the
23 science in the field at large.

1 e. Suggestions that are out of scope for IJED. Several respondents proposed
2 changes to Wiley’s business model (e.g., reducing subscription price) that are not under
3 the control of the editors. Respondents also suggested that the Journal should advocate
4 for research funding, provide funding, or publish updates about funding opportunities.
5 We share the conviction that more needs to be done to educate the public about the
6 need for greater allocation of resources for research and practice. Although these
7 funding initiatives are beyond the scope of the Journal, we applaud the advocacy work
8 accomplished by local and global organizations that secure funding for the field. We
9 also thank our research colleagues who contribute to advocacy efforts by conducting
10 rigorous research that provides the data needed to make the case for support, who take
11 the time to share their expertise for actions such as lobbying governments, and who
12 make charitable gifts in support of advocacy groups.

13 Changes We are Working toward Implementing

14 a. Permitting manuscript submissions of COVID-19-related papers that do not fit
15 IJED’s standard manuscript types (e.g., papers that do not meet standards for
16 systematic reviews or for research reports). IJED temporarily has expanded the range
17 of manuscript types, while continuing to uphold expectations for content to reflect
18 scholarly rigor. Authors may request that a manuscript is designated for publication as a
19 Clinical Forum or a Research Forum, depending on whether the focus is on a clinical
20 management issue (e.g., best practices for providing psychotherapy during stay-at-
21 home orders) or a research topic (e.g., manuscripts focusing on “best COVID-19
22 research practices” that does not fit within criteria for “original research”, “brief report”,
23 or “systematic review” formats). Authors should send a pre-submission inquiry to the

1 Editor-In-Chief (RSW) to determine suitability of their work for either of these manuscript
2 types.

3 b. Issue guidance for authors and reviewers on how to report and evaluate COVID-
4 19-related changes to research protocols for studies impacted by COVID-19. Upon
5 consultation with the IJED editorial board, we will update author and reviewer guidelines
6 to address this important concern. We expect to launch these updates by fall of 2020.

7 c. Revise the “statistics reporting checklist that lists what, minimally, must be
8 included in the data analysis section.” IJED provides detailed guidance about statistical
9 reporting requirements as part of the author guidelines. We recognize, however, that
10 this guidance section is unduly long and would benefit from streamlining. We will
11 undertake a revision that, hopefully, will simplify and clarify instructions about IJED
12 requirements for statistical reporting.

13 d. Publish “topical” papers or guidance related to COVID-19. Respondents
14 suggested several specific topics (e.g., “Best practices for conducting virtual study visits
15 and on-line data collection;” “New intervention guidelines for conducting treatment
16 during COVID-19 pandemic”). IJED welcomes COVID-19-related content, including
17 original research and “best practices” papers. We continue to be interested in all high-
18 quality research that fits our scope, and we will take care that all submissions receive
19 fair and comprehensive evaluations.

20 e. Open access of IJED content. Respondents requested more open-access
21 content during the COVID-19 period. Wiley has agreed to make some COVID-19-
22 related content available free of charge for a period of time. We also note that numerous
23 European institutions have secured an agreement permitting authors affiliated with

1 these institutions to publish primary research and review papers open access at no
2 charge to the author. To determine eligibility, readers are directed to (Wiley & Sons,
3 2020).

4 In Closing

5 With this editorial, we shared our thoughts and planned actions in response to
6 the input we received via our survey of researchers in the field. We remain committed to
7 an open dialogue with the eating disorders research community, to responding flexibly
8 to evolving needs or concerns, and to adjust course where indicated. This editorial has
9 focused on research-related concerns. This focus shall not detract from paying attention
10 to the disruptive impacts of COVID-19 on all activities in our field, including clinical work,
11 teaching, and advocacy. We are pleased to have published a recent Clinical Forum that
12 offers best practices examples shared by clinicians providing Cognitive-Behavioral
13 Therapy (Waller et al., in press), and we anticipate other publications that will be of
14 interest to a broad readership.

15 We are humbled by and grateful for the passion and commitment of the eating
16 disorders research community. Despite the strains and disruptions caused by COVID-
17 19, many colleagues took the time to complete our survey and provide detailed
18 suggestions. Indeed, in response to the survey, we also received private emails in
19 which colleagues added personal anecdotes of their current lives, such as the
20 challenges they faced maintaining clinical services or supporting their students at a time
21 of great uncertainty and for some, personal health risk. We thank our respondents for
22 sharing their perspectives, insights and suggestions with us, and we wish all of them
23 and our readers good health and a bright future.

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