

18th February 2019

Dear Dr Clark

We are writing in response to your comment published in last week's *Lancet*: 'What is *The Lancet* doing about gender and diversity?' Raising the profile of gender issues in research and academia is incredibly important and we were very glad to see this. In this piece you outlined the need to better engage with young female researchers, and to increase the proportion of articles authored by women. As young female researchers, we would like to share our recent experience of publishing in your journal and to highlight the value of co-first authorship in promoting female academics.

We are co-first authors of the [systematic review](#) on the effects of parental migration on the health of left-behind children and adolescents, published in December and edited by you. This authorship arrangement made sense in light of the fact that we both took maternity leave during the study, and we both contributed equally to the research. However, because of the nature of co-first authorship someone always has to go first. *The Lancet* recognises co-first authorship using superscript, which is common across academic journals, however it fails to recognise the arrangement in reference lists. We are grateful that *The Lancet* agreed to change the comment that accompanied our article to include the names of both co-authors in the text. Linked to this issue, Dr Rose-Clarke's university [profile](#), which automatically uploads articles that she has authored, fails to recognise the equal contribution of co-first authors. Promotions and interview panels are also vague on the value of co-first authorship as an academic achievement.

The issue of co-first authorship has broader implications for gender equity. For example, a [study](#) by Aakhus et al (2018) found that among mixed gender co-first authors publishing in clinical journals, women were significantly more likely to be placed second. In our experience, female early career researchers struggle to keep up with the academic meritocracy when their careers are interrupted by maternity leave, and their working week is curtailed by childcare commitments. Co-first authorship offers a more flexible way for women to lead on high impact research and to obtain the academic recognition that they deserve. We call for standards in how co-first authorship is represented and interpreted, and for authors to acknowledge co-first authorship in their citations. *The Lancet* should see this as an opportunity to show leadership, by endorsing co-first authorship and making the arrangement more visible in publications.

Kind regards

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