

# Do awards help to improve the scientific quality of publications and research?

*¿Los premios ayudan a mejorar la calidad científica de las publicaciones e investigaciones?*

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A scientific award reflects an incentive: economic, social, professional advancement or curricular. They can even define the achievement of a job, or even the permanence in one. It can motivate authors to make more in-depth publications. But it can also discourage those who deserved to win it and could not. In addition, it can contribute to the lack of diversity at higher levels. <sup>(1)</sup>

The awards raise the profiles and increase the credibility of researchers. But they do not only boost the career of the winning authors, they also reinforce biases. In general, the awards are won by a relatively small group and interconnected to others who also receive awards. <sup>(1)</sup>

A classic example of this is the Nobel Prizes. There is a perennial preponderance of men (only 6% laureates women) and whites. In addition, of the 10 institutions where the most repeated laureates worked, nine are in United States. This shows that the selection processes and policies are inequitable or lack transparency, and cause this important prize worldwide to lack diversity among the winners <sup>(1)</sup>

Another bias of the Nobel Prizes is that they emphasize the idea of the "lone genius": they award one or a small number of people, and they neglect the contributions of colleagues or teamwork. <sup>(2)</sup>

Here we find the Matilda effect and the Matthew effect. The Matilda effect is an unconscious bias in which the male counterpart is awarded by the discovery of a women. The explanation of the Matthew effect is simplified by Percy Bysshe Shelley's phrase "the rich get richer and the poor get poorer."

In other words, awarding prizes to those who are already prestigious in relation to lesser-known authors. <sup>(2)</sup>

In a survey by the Royal Society of Chemistry in London on what level should be recognized, the most frequent choice was "individuals." <sup>(3)</sup>

Prizes and awards should be a mechanism to share new advances with a variety of different audiences and should reflect the impact of research, innovation, commitment and teaching. They should also reflect the diversity of our community. <sup>(3)</sup>

Another point that concerns Paraguayan researchers is being classified within the minority group at an international level. And minority candidates are also less likely to be nominated for prizes by others, since research contributions from underrepresented groups are more likely to go unrecognized. <sup>(1)</sup>

In this regard, the American College of Surgeons (ACS) and the Americas Hepato-Pancreato-Biliary Association (AHPBA) have implemented scholarships specifically awarded to international (non-American) or even Latin American applicants. <sup>(4)</sup>

There has been considerable progress in this reduction of bias, but there is still a long way to go. In order to try to reduce these biases in the awarding of the best works of the 21st Paraguayan Congress of Surgery, a detailed rubric has been established for each category, in addition to a guide on how to act and probable conflicts of interest with inhibition criteria. Let us hope that this is the beginning of a more neutral competition for everyone.

## REFERENCES

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