

Letter to the Editor: “Oral Health Research in the WHO African Region: A Scoping Review”

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Dear Editor,

We commend the authors of “Oral Health Research in the WHO African Region: A Scoping Review” for addressing oral health research in Africa (Labarca et al. 2024). However, we express concern about 2 aspects. First, of the 28 authors, only 2 are affiliated with institutions in Africa. The poor representation of African researchers on this study raises concerns about equitable researcher representation in a study about Africa. Including more African scholars could have ensured that findings more accurately reflected African perspectives about the health care systems and challenges faced. The poor representation of African scholars may reflect the external “foreign gaze” in global health narratives (Abimbola 2019).

Second, the article states that most African oral health research originates from dental schools, without providing support for this claim. Given that many African nations lack dental schools, this statement inadvertently oversimplifies the complex landscape of research across the region. It also overlooks community-based research and the active contributions of public health departments and nongovernmental organizations to oral health knowledge generation, particularly in areas lacking formal dental academic institutions. The authors could have substantiated this claim by citing, for example, the paper of Bennani et al. (2021), which is already in their reference list. In addition, they could have provided a list of African dental schools and then analyzed the association to support the claim. A more nuanced, evidence-based approach would better reflect how oral health research is conducted in Africa. This clarity is essential for informing equitable capacity-building efforts across the continent and preventing resources from disproportionately favoring nations with dental schools, thereby widening existing gaps.

Authors Contributions

M.O. Foláyan, contributed to conception, design, data acquisition and interpretation, drafted and critically revised the manuscript; A. Bhayat, contributed to conception, data acquisition and analysis, critically revised the manuscript; M. El Tantawi, contributed to conception, data interpretation, critically revised the manuscript. All authors gave final approval and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

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