

All male panels and gender diversity of issue panels and plenary sessions at ISPOR Europe

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ABSTRACT

Objective: ISPOR is the leading professional society for health economics and outcomes research (HEOR) globally. Recently, it launched its Women in HEOR Initiative, that aims to serve as a catalyst for women's leadership in the field. Therefore, we were interested to find out how well ISPOR itself is doing in terms of gender diversity at their biggest conference.

Methods: We used the conference programmes of ISPOR Europe conferences in 2016, 2017 and 2018 to assess the gender distribution of speakers that participated in issue panels and plenary sessions in these years.

Results: 70% of all speakers (N=346) at 85 issue panels and plenary sessions during 2016, 2017, and 2018 were male. Almost one in three panels was all-male (a 'manel') and 64% of all panels had mostly male speakers (>50%). In contrast, only 11% of panels had <50% female speakers.

Conclusion: Despite laudable effort to support the growth, development and contribution of women in HEOR through its Women in HEOR Initiative, females appear to be severely underrepresented at ISPOR's biggest conference. ISPOR should make gender diversity a formal requirement for issue panel abstract submissions if it wants to advance women's leadership in HEOR.

INTRODUCTION

Despite making up half of the world's population, women are still underrepresented in many fields of science, business, and politics. At conferences, the all-male panel ('manel') is a well-known and increasingly criticised phenomenon. Furthermore, there is growing awareness of the need to ensure diversity among speakers at international conferences. Especially in panel sessions at scientific conferences that aim to debate issues from a variety of perspectives, it is crucial that these perspectives extend beyond those of white men.

In our own personal experience, the health economics and outcomes research (HEOR) field is not particularly male-dominated. In our own organisations and in scholarly work, we encounter many women who make important contributions to the field. Yet, in recent years we have observed that speaker diversity at many conferences, workshops and symposia in the HEOR field remains disappointing. In order to assess whether our own observations held any truth, we assessed the gender distribution of speakers at the International Society for Pharmacoeconomics and Outcomes Research (ISPOR) Europe conferences issue panels and plenary sessions. We selected ISPOR conferences as ISPOR is '*the leading professional society for health economics and outcomes research globally*'[1] and the annual European meeting is its largest meeting, attended by almost 5000 attendees in 2017[2] making it, to our best knowledge, the largest annual scientific conference in HEOR worldwide.

METHODS

We included ISPOR Europe conferences of the last three years (2018 Barcelona; 2017 Glasgow; 2016 Vienna) in our sample. We did not include more years in our dataset as the programmes of conferences that took place earlier than 2016 were no longer accessible through the ISPOR website. For each conference, we used the programme to identify the list of speakers for each issue panel (between 20 and 30 in total per conference) and for all plenary sessions (3 per conference). We included issue panels as these are meant to debate views on controversial topics. The submission instructions for issue panels are that they are '*designed to stimulate real debate on new or controversial topics in health economics and outcomes research*' and that '*each panelist is expected to provide a different perspective on the issue*'. [3] In addition, an abstract submitted for an issue panel requires the moderator of the issue panel to invite experts to participate in the panel. The ability to participate in issue

panels, therefore, requires a panellist to be recognised by their peers as an expert on the issue panel's topic and to be invited to contribute to an abstract for submission to the conference.

We assumed people listed in the conference programme with names commonly used by males, to identify as male and people listed with names commonly used by females, to identify as female. When we encountered a name where gender was not obvious (e.g. Kim; Robin) we used Google to assess the gender the person most likely identified as, for example through their LinkedIn profile page. Although some people will identify as neither male or female, for the purposes of this study we were unable to be more specific. Both authors extracted all data independently. Inter-rater reliability was assessed and all divergences were solved through consensus. We used Microsoft Excel to calculate the gender distributions for each year.

RESULTS

We found that in total, 70% of speakers listed on issue panels and plenary sessions at ISPOR Europe conferences during 2016-2018 were males. In total, 346 people participated in 85 issue panels and plenary sessions at ISPOR Europe conferences in 2016, 2017, and 2018 (Table 1). In 2016, 73% speakers were male, with 66% male speakers in 2017 and 70% male speakers in 2018.

	Distribution of speakers on panels and plenary sessions					
	Males	Females	Manels (%)	>50% males	>50% females	All-female panels
Barcelona, 2018	87 (70%)	37 (30%)	9 (30%)	19 (63%)	3 (10%)	1 (3%)
Glasgow, 2017	82 (66%)	42 (34%)	8 (26%)	18 (58%)	4 (13%)	1 (3%)
Vienna, 2016	72 (73%)	26 (27%)	8 (33%)	17 (71%)	2 (8%)	0 (0%)
Total	241 (70%)	105 (30%)	25 (29%)	54 (64%)	9 (11%)	2 (2%)

Table 1: Male and female speakers and distribution of speakers on issue panels and plenary sessions at ISPOR Europe conferences in 2016, 2017, 2018

Almost 30 percent of all panels at ISPOR Europe conferences were manels (29.4% in 2016-2018). In 2016, 33% of panels were all-male, in 2017, 26% of panels were all-male, and in 2018, 30% of panels were all-male (Figure 1, Table 1). Furthermore, issue panels and plenary sessions were male dominated even if they were not a manel: 64% of all panels at the three conferences had a majority of male speakers (>50%). Only 11% of the panels and plenary

sessions had mostly female speakers (>50%), and 26% of panels and session had an equal amount of male and female speakers.

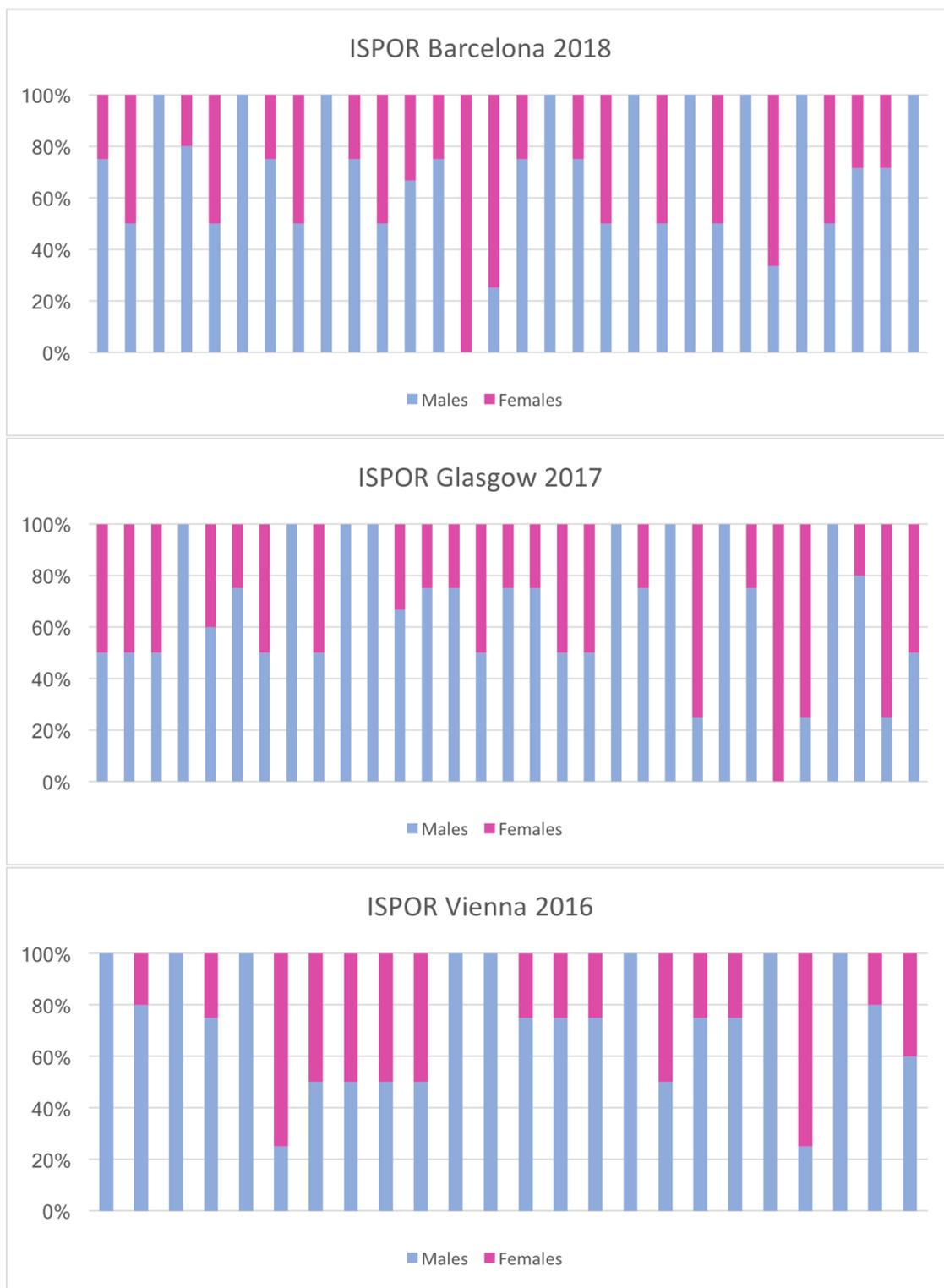


Figure 1: Distribution of speakers for all issue panels and plenary sessions at ISPOR conferences in 2016, 2017, and 2018

DISCUSSION

ISPOR Europe is the largest HEOR conference in the world. Manels are a common phenomenon at ISPOR Europe, where almost one in three issue panels is a manel and 70% of all issue panel and plenary session speakers were male during 2016-2018. Given that 8 of the 12 current members of the ISPOR Board of Directors are women, we highly doubt that there are not enough capable female experts available to participate in issue panels and plenary sessions.

ISPOR could make a meaningful contribution to advancing women in HEOR – the aim of ISPOR’s own Women in HEOR Initiative[4] - by no longer accepting abstract submissions for issue panels where there is not at least one female panellist in a non-moderator role, and by banning all-male plenary sessions. Given ISPOR’s interest in advancing women in HEOR, banning manels would both improve the gender balance of speakers at ISPOR conferences and would send a clear signal that ISPOR is serious about its commitment to advance women’s leadership in the field. Speaking opportunities at plenary sessions and as a panellist for an issue panel can be important to advance the career of a HEOR professional, and thus, are important for men and women to establish themselves as experts on key HEOR issues. Currently, panellists and speakers at ISPOR Europe are predominantly male.

There are several limitations to this study. First, we only included data for the last three years of ISPOR Europe conferences, as the programmes for earlier years were not available. We cannot exclude the possibility that gender distribution was much more favourable before 2016, but if this would be the case, the decrease in diversity among speakers in recent years would be slightly alarming and even more reason for considering implementing policy changes. All data were collected manually and it is possible that some names were misclassified or errors made. However, both authors extracted all data independently, initial inter-rater agreement was 94%, and all identified divergences were solved through consensus.

We did not take moderator versus non-moderator roles on issue panels and during plenary sessions into account. There is evidence to suggest that women are more often assigned the role of moderator, rather than as a panellist, when being invited to participate in a panel.[4] We were not able to study other types of diversity at ISPOR, such as representation of speakers from different countries or from ethnic minorities as there is not a straightforward method to do so. Notwithstanding we strongly believe aims to improve diversity should not just be limited to improving gender balance. Making other diversity requirements for the

representativeness of speakers would be easy to implement and should be considered in the process of abstract submission and review.

Not everyone will share our view that the high proportion of manels at ISPOR Europe conferences – or any conference – is a problem. Neither of the authors are gender studies scholars (we are both women who work in HEOR) and therefore, we have limited this paper to describing the gender distribution at ISPOR Europe without exploring in detail what possible causes of the overrepresentation of men might be. Notwithstanding, we believe that any person in the HEOR field, regardless of their gender or ethnicity, deserves equal access to career opportunities such as participating as experts in panel discussions and plenary sessions. This view is clearly shared by ISPOR, given their recent Women in HEOR Initiative. By including a requirement for the gender diversity of panellists in the issue panel abstract submission process, and by banning manels, ISPOR could make a strong statement of support for its Women in HEOR initiative, that states that ‘*diversity in the field will result in better research and better healthcare decisions*’.[4] We could not agree more.

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