

Who reads the SSMJ? Summary report on the readership of the journal 2008–2021

SSMJ Editorial Team

Introduction

In February 2008 Dr Eluzai Abe Hakim launched the Southern Sudan Medical Bulletin which has evolved into the quarterly 24-page free online journal, the South Sudan Medical Journal (SSMJ), the only medical journal in South Sudan. The Editor-in-Chief is Dr Edward Eremugo Kenyi. There are three Trustees who oversee our limited funds.

To date (August 2021) we have published 55 issues each containing around 5-8 main peer reviewed articles and several short items. SSMJ is a member of African Journal Online (AJOL), is listed by the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) and has a Facebook group. We are presently updating our website, and investigating other ways to improve the journal.

We hope that this article, which shows an increasing number of visits to the journal, will encourage readers to continue submitting their research and other manuscripts, and to tell us how we can improve the content, and outreach of the journal, especially within South Sudan and Africa. Send your feedback to southsudanmedicaljournal@gmail.com.

SSMJ readership: who? what? where?

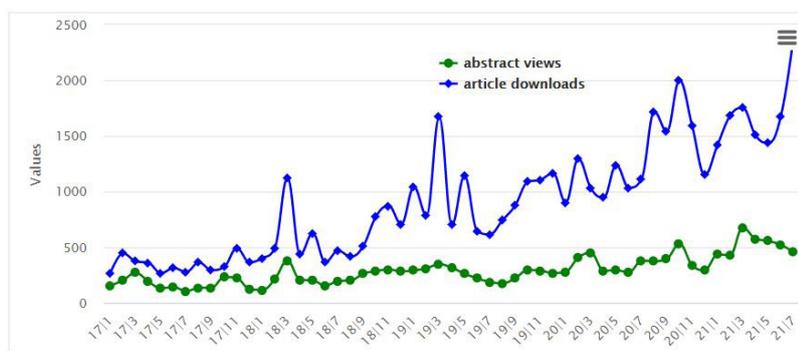
We have examined data from AJOL, Google Analytics and our mailchimp mailing list. The journal is also distributed through the networks of the SSMJ team and colleagues.

Data from AJOL

The [AJOL](#) website shows the number of views of abstracts and downloads of articles over time and by country for each issue of SSMJ (click on the month of interest).

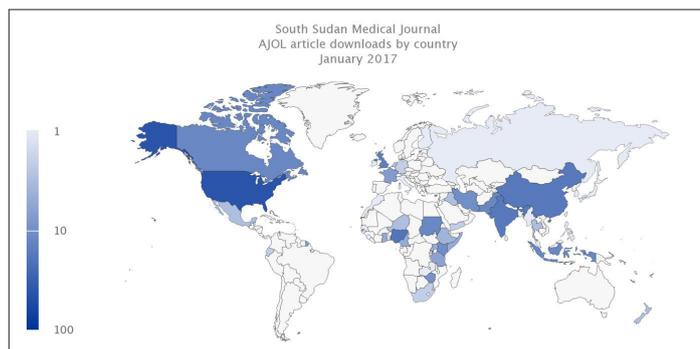
As of July 2021 (the latest date with complete data), the site carried 354 titles (articles) in 56 issues (since we joined AJOL in 2017). AJOL does not upload all SSMJ items and does not show the number of views for specific articles. Downloads of articles have increased from 269 in January 2017 to 2373 in July 2021. See Summary Figure AJOL 1.

The maps in Summary Figures 2a and 2b show that the countries with the greatest the number of downloads has changed (and increased) between 2017 and 2021.

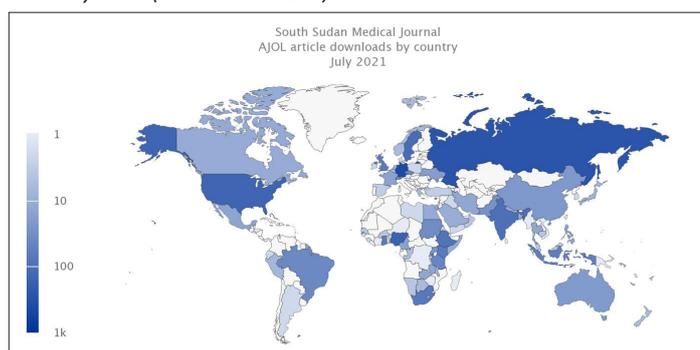


Summary Figure AJOL 1. Views and downloads from each issue from February 2017 to July 2021

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Summary Figure AJOL 2a. Number of articles downloaded by country in February 2017 (note: scale 1-100)



Summary Figure AJOL 2b. Number of articles downloaded by country in July 2021 (note: scale 1-1K)

	Germany	410		China	22
	Russian Federation	281		Australia	20
	Nigeria	163		Ukraine	18
	United States	147		Rwanda	16
	Sweden	111		Cameroon	15
	India	100		France	15
	Ethiopia	84		Philippines	15
	South Africa	72		Mexico	14
	Kenya	68		Iran, Islamic Rep.	13
	United Kingdom	66		Zambia	13
	Ghana	62		Bangladesh	12
	Indonesia	58		Nepal	12
	Switzerland	53		Thailand	12
	Czech Republic	45		Canada	11
	Tanzania	44		Egypt, Arab Rep.	11
	Brazil	39		Somalia	11
	Sudan	34		Netherlands	10
	Pakistan	27		Saudi Arabia	10
	Uganda	26			

Summary Figure AJOL 3. Number of downloaded articles in July 2021 by countries from which there were at least 10 article downloads

Summary Table A. Page views of most popular articles in June 2020 and May 2021

[Issue] Page Title	202006	202105	Total over 12 months
[May 2010] How to read an Electrocardiogram (ECG). Part One: Basic principles of the ECG. The normal ECG	21386	39336	346357
[May 2008] How to Read a Chest X-ray – A Step by Step Approach	5322	13721	99292
[Nov 2011] How to treat kerosene poisoning	5658	3866	58415
[May 2016] Factors contributing to, and effects of, teenage pregnancy in Juba	1250	4608	38051
[Feb 2013] Tuberculosis 2: Pathophysiology and microbiology of pulmonary tuberculosis	2268	3674	31907
[Nov 2008] Tapes for measuring Mid Upper Arm Circumference	1042	1531	17715
[Aug 2016] How to interpret an unenhanced CT Brain scan. Part 1: Basic principles of Computed Tomography and relevant neuroanatomy	1196	1538	16174
[Nov 2010] How to read an electrocardiogram (ECG). Part 2: Abnormalities of Electrical Conduction	953	1361	13990
[May 2008] Undernutrition in Adults and Children: causes, consequences and what we can do	719	2518	13557
[May 2017] How to interpret liver function tests	649	2546	12375
[Nov 2016] How to perform a Lumbar Puncture	822	835	9449
[May 2009] Feeding infants whose mothers are HIV-positive	709	722	8564
[Nov 2015] The importance of research in healthcare	470	436	5802
[May 2016] Open Appendectomy....How I do it	305	504	5518
Other	10077	13033	133842
Total	54245	92223	829985

SUMMARY

Summary Table B.1 Total visitors to articles between June 2020 – May 2021 – top 15 countries

Country	Total
South Sudan	4608
India	199594
United States	102256
Philippines	40456
United Kingdom	30888
South Africa	19661
Kenya	19436
Pakistan	19264
Nigeria	16610
Malaysia	10494
Australia	10372
Canada	9763
Ghana	7518
Zambia	7092
Saudi Arabia	6795
Bangladesh	6749

Summary Table B.2. Total visitors from East/Central Africa to articles between June 2020 – May 2021

Country	Total
Burundi	40
Central African Republic	50
Congo - Kinshasa	115
Djibouti	24
Eritrea	9
Ethiopia	3289
Kenya	19436
Rwanda	593
Somalia	1013
South Sudan	4608
Sudan	2540
Tanzania	6070
Uganda	5209
Zambia	7092
Saudi Arabia	6795
Bangladesh	6749

Summary Figure AJOL 3 shows the number of downloaded articles in July 2021 by countries from which there were at least 10 article downloads; note that there were no downloads in South Sudan although 46 Abstracts were viewed.

Data from Google Analytics (analysed by James Beard)

Data showing the number of pages (or titles/articles) viewed were available from 2010. See the [full report](#) for detailed individual tables.

Summary Table A lists the top most popular titles, (published between 2008 – 2017), the number of times they were viewed in June 2020 and May 2021, and the total views for each over the 12-month period between June 2020 and May 2021.

Papers with 'How to' in the title were consistently most popular. Of the 14 titles 8 were entitled 'How to...'; three were related to malnutrition.

The top title, 'How to read an ECG', had consistently the most views over the 12-month period with a total of 346K views (which is ~43% of the total visits of all titles of ~830K). However, this seems to be an 'outlier' as the second most popular title had 99K views, and views to the other 'top-14' titles ranged from totals of 58K to 6K.

The number of visits to each paper went up over the year; there was a total of 54K views in June 2020 and 92K in May 2021.

When 'top' titles were examined by number of viewers

in East Africa there was a similar picture with 'How to...' articles being popular. See Table C in the [full report](#).

Summary Tables B.1 and B.2 list total visits to titles by countries from 1 June 2020 to 31 May 2021. The 15 countries with the most frequent visits are shown in Summary Table B.1.

Again, the trend in most countries (see [full report](#)) was for visits to increase over the year. The total visits from all countries were 40K in June 2020 and 70K in May 2021.

Among African countries the five with the highest number of total visits over the year were: South Africa 20K, Nigeria 17K, Kenya 19K, Ghana 8K and Zambia 7K; South Sudan was 4.6K. For countries neighbouring South Sudan (Summary Table B.2) those with the most visits (i.e., $\geq 1K$) were: Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda.

Data from the Mailchimp mailing list

Our mailing list was started in 2010. In August 2020 it contained >400 email addresses but the number of 'clicks' had decreased from a high of 50% in 2010 to around 15% in 2020. This is probably due to many email addresses changing, and thus this analysis gave no useful data.

Conclusion

These data give a clear indication of:

- The increasing access to the journal and

- the type of papers read which in turn
- helps us the focus on what readers find valuable.
- The spread of countries across the world from where readers access SSMJ.
- What can be done with minimal resources (apart from our collective voluntary hard work) and
- this indicates that sustainability of such a journal can be maintained by international co-operation and commitment.

In addition:

- Mailchimp is of limited direct use but the mailer is being forwarded on by recipients to colleagues.
- Comments received by some of the team indicate that presentation/format has improved.
- Access and thus number of visits should increase when the new website allows better access via cellphone/mobile.
- Shows value of being accepted and listed by AJOL.

Follow-up

Although the readership data are encouraging, we have several challenges to keep the journal sustainable and improving. For example:

- The need for more people to find authors/topics for articles, and to collect 'news' relevant to health professionals working in South Sudan.

- Need to encourage more Board members to motivate their students/colleagues to submit their manuscripts.
- About 5-6 people are doing most of the editorial work. So we need more people to copyedit – for authors unused to publishing we can spend a lot of time (and emails) sorting their articles.
- Need backstops for key people such as the Editor-in-Chief, especially to deal with IT issues.
- Need to 'advertise' the journal more widely through networks and social media. Do we need more publicity within and outside South Sudan? Why are there so many readers in Kenya compared to other neighbouring countries?
- How do we reach out to more nurses/midwives, and other health professionals, including medical students?

Types of articles and content

- Although 'How to...' articles are popular they are not the only well-read ones and for the journal to increase its prestige we must publish more good research relevant to South Sudan.
- When resources (especially human) allow we should develop our 'e-learning zone'.