

## Publication

### An update on the “empirical turn” in bioethics: analysis of empirical research in nine bioethics journals

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**Keywords** Bioethics, Empirical research, Literature review, Qualitative research, Quantitative research  
**Background** A review of literature published a decade ago noted a significant increase in empirical papers across nine bioethics journals. This study provides an update on the presence of empirical papers in the same nine journals. It first evaluates whether the empirical trend is continuing as noted in the previous study, and second, how it is changing, that is, what are the characteristics of the empirical works published in these nine bioethics journals. **Method** A review of the same nine journals (Bioethics; Journal of Medical Ethics; Journal of Clinical Ethics; Nursing Ethics; Cambridge Quarterly of Healthcare Ethics; Hastings Center Report; Theoretical Medicine and Bioethics; Christian Bioethics; and Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal) was conducted for a 12-year period from 2004 to 2015. Data obtained was analysed descriptively and using a non-parametric Chi-square test. **Results** Of the total number of original papers (N = 5567) published in the nine bioethics journals, 18.1% (n = 1007) collected and analysed empirical data. Journal of Medical Ethics and Nursing Ethics led the empirical publications, accounting for 89.4% of all empirical papers. The former published significantly more quantitative papers than qualitative, whereas the latter published more qualitative papers. Our analysis reveals no significant difference ( $\chi^2 = 2.857$ ;  $p = 0.091$ ) between the proportion of empirical papers published in 2004–2009 and 2010–2015. However, the increasing empirical trend has continued in these journals with the proportion of empirical papers increasing from 14.9% in 2004 to 17.8% in 2015. **Conclusions** This study presents the current state of affairs regarding empirical research published nine bioethics journals. In the quarter century of data that is available about the nine bioethics journals studied in two reviews, the proportion of empirical publications continues to increase, signifying a trend towards empirical research in bioethics. The growing volume is mainly attributable to two journals: Journal of Medical Ethics and Nursing Ethics. This descriptive study further maps the still developing field of empirical research in bioethics. Additional studies are needed to completely map the nature and extent of empirical research in bioethics to inform the ongoing debate about the value of empirical research for bioethics.

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