

Statement of the German speaking group of the ISFG on the suppression of Forensic Science International: Genetics from JCR

The German speaking working group of the International Society for Forensic Genetics (ISFG) comprises 205 members working in forensic science in Germany, Austria and Switzerland. We regard Forensic Science International: Genetics (FSIGenetics) as our main scientific journal. In July 2020 we were informed about Clarivate's decision to remove FSIGenetics from the Web of Science Journal Citation Reports™ (JCR) - the journal will not receive a Journal Impact Factor in 2019. This was very unexpected for the more than 1,400 members of ISFG. Clarivate justifies its decision with a high percentage of self-citations. It should be noted that the percentage of self-citations of FSIGenetics. JCR data indicates that 2019 showed the lowest rate since 2014 and has declined by 20% in the last five years.

FSIGenetics' self-citation rate may be relatively high compared to other journals within "Genetics & Hereditary". One potential reason for the high self-citation rate is the very specific field of knowledge and research of forensic genetics. Many ISFG members are authors and/or reviewers of Forensic Sci. Int. Genet and can attest to the hard and demanding review process that leads to a high rejection rate of manuscripts. For this reason, only the best researchers in this field have a chance of being accepted to publish in this journal. Articles with the most relevant and novel research are commonly published in FSIGenet. , Subsequently, these studies are frequently cited due to their high impact within the forensic community. Therefore, FSIGenetics has a strong and leading position in our field. The reliable scientific impact is also supported by a CiteScore of 8.1 (2019).

Last year's ousting of this journal from JCR is problematic for the majority of researchers, who have worked hard to have their work published in the highest ranking journal of the field. The consequence of Clarivate's decision is that the chance to obtain competitive research funding in forensic genetics will decrease immensely. This inevitably leads to a delay in scientific research development. Ongoing research in our highly specialized field is of utmost importance not only for research groups but also for law enforcement and criminal justice. Articles published in this journal are used forensic experts in courtrooms around the world for unbiased interpretation of crime scene evidence based on sound scientific data. This kind of research, however, requires extensive resources, which are hard to obtain in an already highly competitive research environment.

FSIGenetics forms the main route of communicating knowledge in our field and helps to avoid unjust decisions in criminal proceedings and miscarriage of justice. We would highly appreciate and welcome a discourse between Clarivate™ and the editorial board of FSIGenetics to clarify the situation and agree on measures e.g. to reduce self-citation.



Dr. Uta-Dorothee Immel

Chair of the German Speaking Working Group