

## Perspective

### Ethiopian Journal of Pediatrics and Child Health: Reminiscing its 20-year journey

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*“Be sure that in your educating you are not manufacturing obedient citizens, but rather unleashing powerful, creative souls.”*

*- Vince Gnomon -*

#### Summary

The Ethiopian Pediatric Society established the Ethiopian Journal of Pediatrics and Child Health in 2005 as its official organ to bolster the generation and publication of scientific evidence on child health in Ethiopia and beyond. Members' needs, capabilities of the Society, and the overall socio-economic landscape of the country were duly considered in the conceptualization, initiation, functioning, and trajectory of the Journal. Driven by the impetus to fill the gaps in systematically disseminating information on child health, a working group of pediatricians developed a draft guideline for the Editorial Board. The Journal had to jumpstart in an environment with an underdeveloped research and publishing culture and capacity, and fierce competition for manuscripts by existing journals in-country and overseas.

The Ethiopian Journal of Pediatrics initiated its functions in a one-room office of the Society in

Kazanchis, Addis Ababa. Each year, it managed to publish one Issue until 2015 and two issues since 2016 - in print form until June 2017 and both online and in print since then. The Journal has secured ISSN numbers - ISSN 2413-2640 for print and ISSN 2519-0334 for online publications. It subscribes to the National Journal Accreditation Guideline, the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors Guideline, and the World Association of Medical Editors Editorial Policy. It is included in the list of reputable journals by Addis Ababa University and officially recognized by the Ministry of Education. It is in the Scopus and the Ethiopian and African Journals Online databases.

The Journal's standard publications constitute Editorials, Original Articles, Review Articles, Brief Communications, Policy Briefs, Case Studies, Teaching Articles, and Letters to the Editor. The number and variety of articles increased over the years. The Journal has

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published 185 articles in 24 issues organized in 19 volumes. Nearly two-thirds (62.2%) of the publications were original articles, 74% were multi-authored, 77.6% were from Addis Ababa, and 86.5% were from academic or affiliated teaching institutions.

## Background

**Country context:** The Ethiopian Journal of Pediatrics and Child Health (EJPCH) was established in 2005 as an official organ of the Ethiopian Pediatric Society (EPS) to advance evidence-based pediatrics and child health academics, policy guidance, and care service standards (1). The Journal's establishment and growth, and development have primarily been impacted by the vision, mission, goals and values as well as the capacity of the Society to effectively function within the context of Ethiopia. In 2005, the country had an estimated population of over 78 million, children 0-18 years constituting over 48% of the population, and was the second most populous country in Africa after Nigeria (2,3).

Ethiopia's projected population for 2024 was estimated at 132 million, with a median age of 18.9 years, of which children comprised 45% (59.5 million) (4). Annual population growth was estimated at 2.62% and life expectancy at birth, both sexes combined, at 67.7 years. Infant mortality and under-five mortality rates for 2024 were estimated at 31.9 and 43.2 live births per 1,000, respectively. Over two-thirds of childhood deaths were mainly caused by infections, neonatal conditions, and malnutri-

tion. Malnutrition – stunting (37%), underweight (21%), and wasting (7%) (5)–was the major underlying cause for nearly one-half of childhood deaths.

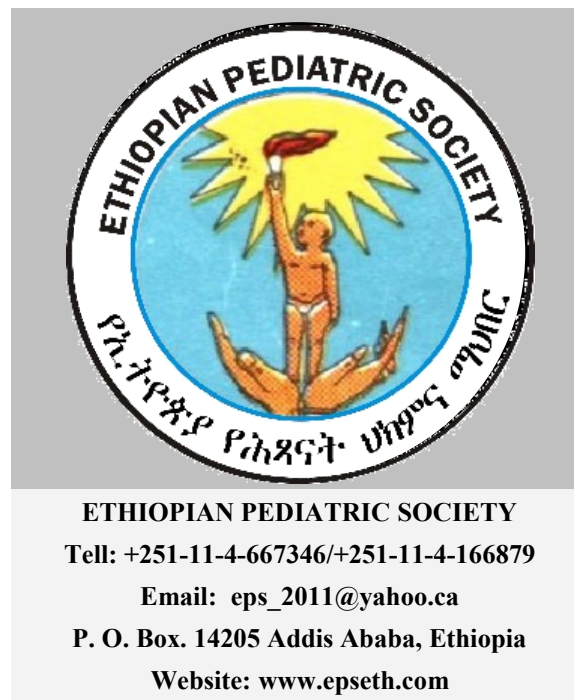
While a substantial proportion of Ethiopia's population was, for long, under 18 years, health research, the dissemination of research outputs, and access to the little information that was published were limited. The limited information generated through locally conducted research was disseminated in the three local health journals established earlier - the Ethiopian Medical Journal (1964), Ethiopian Journal of Health Development (1984), and Ethiopian Journal of Health Sciences (1990) (6). The relatively better articles, primarily from the academic and research institutions, were submitted to journals overseas, partly because the local research and teaching institutions used to promote and give more credit articles published overseas and manuscript processing by the local journals was relatively sluggish. Filling the crucial gap in the lack of a dedicated platform for the dissemination of scientific evidence on child health became EPS's historical responsibility and opportunity.

**EPS:** The EPS, the parent institution of EJPCH, was established through an initiative and leadership taken by Professor. Sileshi Lulseged, who drafted a constitution in consultation with Dr. Azeb Tamrat, pediatrician and then State Minister of Health, and other senior pediatricians at the Department of Pediatrics and Child Health of the then School of

Medicine, Addis Ababa University. The draft constitution of the Society was approved at the EPS General Assembly in September 1994.

EPS was established as a voluntary professional society (association) in 1995 with a vision to ensure a high standard of pediatric practice in

Ethiopia, both functionally and ethically (1). Its emblem (Figure 1) was agreed to represent pediatricians, pediatric sub-specialists, pediatric residents, pediatric nurses, and other health professionals who worked with and provided care for children.



**Figure 1.** EPS Embelem and Address

The Society was re-registered with the Ethiopian Charities and Society Agency (CSA) on April 24, 2013, as an Ethiopian Resident Charity Non-Governmental Organization, based on the government's revised regulation (7). Albeit with some limitations, EPS continued as a national association/society of pediatricians committed to working together with governmental and non-governmental organizations on children and youth by nurturing excellence in health care, advocacy, education, research, and support of its members (1,8). EPS has been an

active member of the Union of All African Pediatric Societies and Associations (UNAPSA) since 1996 and the International Pediatric Society (IPA) since May 1997.

Among its core objectives and functions, EPS had the promotion of and support to research in pediatrics and child health, and the publication and dissemination of outputs in its organ, the EJPCH. The EPS has played a critical advisory role to the Ministry of Health, relevant regulatory bodies, and other national and international stakeholders in the planning, implementation,

and evaluation of policies and regulations related to pediatrics and child health, which are anchored in contemporary knowledge and evidence. Spanning over the last three decades, the Society has been active in organizing members under its umbrella and in coordinating and providing sessions on continued medical education as well as workshops relevant to the health and well-being of children and youth in Ethiopia. The membership of the Society has increased progressively and its modus operandi has broadened over the years. Currently, it has a head office in Addis Ababa, six chapter offices in the regions, and 250 paid up member pediatricians, child health specialists, and pediatric nurses.

### **EJPCH establishment**

**Conception and initiation:** The birth of EJPCH was the result of the aspirations of EPS and its member pediatricians and child health specialists to create a scientific Journal that would serve as a platform for sharing, disseminating, and advancing professional knowledge, supporting evidence-based practice, and enhancing the development of program policies, guidelines, quality standards, and tools. Driven by this impetus, a working group of pediatricians, including Dr Hagos Beyene, Dr. Abubaker Bedri, Prof |Bogale Worku, led by Professor Sileshi Lulseged, developed a draft guideline for the Editorial Board. However, a stepping stone, the Society initially established an EPS Newsletter in March 1998 with Dr. Abubaker Bedri, Professor Bogale Worku, and

Dr. Sara Semere elected to serves as Editors.

**First Editorial Board:** In 2005, The Executive Committee of EPS invited a group of senior pediatricians and child health specialists and formed an Editorial Board of the Journal, consisting of Professor Amha Mekasha (Editor-in-Chief), Dr. Abubaker Bedri, Dr. Tilahun Teka, Dr. Tesfaye Tessema, and Dr. Abebe Gebremariam, who led the journal during its early and formative years. The Journal was initially housed in the one-roomed office of the Society in the vicinity of St. Urael Church in Kazanchis, Addis Abeba. The Board prepared the Editorial Policy and the Instructions for Contributors, and selected a lemon-green color for the cover, after the initial two issues,, hoping that the green color would represent the similarity between children plants actively growing and developing.

**Editorial policy:** The Editorial Board, as one of its priority activities, developed an Editorial Policy that would define its functions and guide the editorial process. The policy describes the Board's responsibility in providing oversight to ensure the quality of all submitted manuscripts. It emphasizes the need for and the procedures used by the Board in identifying competent peer reviewers, facilitating the process of peer-reviewing of each manuscript, and ultimately making the decision of accepting or rejecting the manuscript for publication in EJPCH. The policy also highlights that the Editorial Board takes measures that ensure effectiveness, efficiency, and an objective review system, and asserts that the Board strictly observes and

ensures that fundamental ethical standards are met all along the continuum of the review and editorial process.

EJPCH has updated its Editorial Policy periodically in keeping with the standard international guidelines and commensurate with its growth and development. In doing this, it has selectively drawn lessons from the innovative approaches and relevant experiences of other pediatric and child health journals published elsewhere (9), which were in the trade and had achieved excellence and become increasingly specialized in the field. Given that ethical considerations are paramount in child health research and publishing, the Policy underscores that authors, reviewers, and editors have a responsibility to preserve and protect the privacy, dignity, well-being, and freedom of children participating in research.

As stipulated in the Editorial Policy of EJPCH (10), the Journal is an open-access, scientific, double-blind peer-reviewed journal in the field of pediatrics that publishes two issues, one in January and another in July. It was published in print form until June 2017, when the Journal's website was created, and later upgraded in 2024. As of June 2017 (Volume XV, No. 1), the Journal has been published both online (11) and in print version (12). All Issues published in print form before 2017 have been uploaded on the Journal website. EJPCH subscribes to the National Journal Accreditation

Guideline of Ethiopia (13) and other international guidelines, including the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) (14) and the World Association of Medical Editors (WAME) editorial policy (15). EJPCH Guidelines for Authors (16) are provided in each Issue of the Journal.

As described in its Editorial Policy, regular and special/supplemental issues constitute the standing publications of EPJCH, each issue usually constituting an Editorial, Policy Brief (s), Original Articles, Brief Communication, a Case Study, a Review Article, and/or a Teaching Article, and a Letter to the Editor. Review and Teaching Articles are published upon specific invitation and recommendation by the Editorial Board. Two independent peer reviewers review each manuscript. EPS covers manuscript publication costs, and the journal, while allow advertising, does not charge subscription fees, or charge article processing fees.

### **EJPCH publications**

Over the two decades of its existence, EJPCH published 185 articles in 24 issues organized in 19 volumes. The first issue of the Journal was published in May 2005 (Figure 1), which consisted of three Original Articles and a Review Article, and the second issue with four Original Articles, but in a different color, in November 2006 (Figure 2). Of note, issues from Volume III onwards were published with a green cover.



Figure 2: EJPCH, first Issue, May 2005



Figure 3: EJPCH, first Issue, May 2006

Subsequently, the Board's plan to ensure uninterrupted publication of the Journal incrementally increase the number of issues, and expand the content of each issue was thwarted by a severe shortage of submitted articles. The Board initially anticipated that research and research outputs would flourish because of the then mushrooming of residency programs across the Ethiopian universities. However, contrary to the Board's expectation, the number of manuscripts, at least in the initial years, did not substantially increase. The challenges with short-

age of manuscripts were progressively overcome and the number and variety of articles increased over the years. The latest Issues 1 and 2 in Volume XIX published in 2024, just before the documentation of this review are shown in Figures 4 and 5. Illustrating the growth of the Journal, Issue No. 2 consists of an Editorial, six Original Articles, a Case Series, a Case Report, and an article on Policy Analysis.

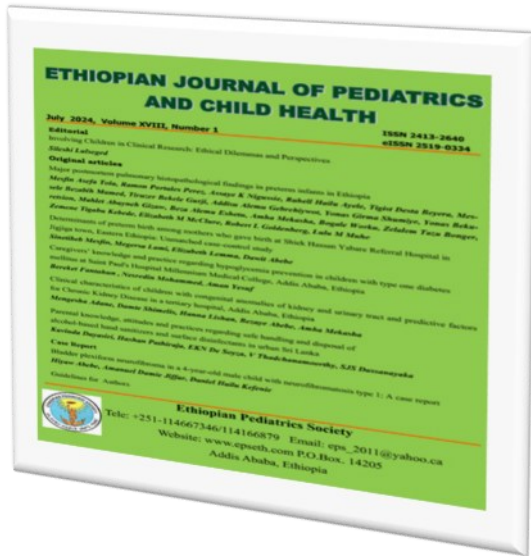


Figure 4: EJPCH Vol. 19 (1), Jul. 2024



Figure 5: EJPCH Vol. 19 (2), Dec. 2024

Of the 185 articles published December 2024, the average number of articles per issue was 7.7% and the average number of original articles per issue was 4.8% (Table 1). Nearly two-thirds (62.2%) were original articles, and one of

the issues was a special issue/monograph dedicated to newborn health. Editorials became consistent features of the Journal starting with Volume 15, the first Issue in 2020.

**Table 1:** Volumes, issues, and articles published in the Ethiopian Journal of Pediatrics and Child Health

Descriptions	Year				Total	Percent
	2005-2009	2010-2014	2015-2019	2020-2024		
Volumes	I-V	VI-X	XI-XIV	XV-XIX	19	-
Number of issues	4	5	5	10	24	-
Number of original articles	19	27	23	46	115	62.2
Number of case reports	2	5	5	5	17	9.2
Number of editorials**	-	2	1	8	11	5.9
Number of review articles	3	3	1	-	7	3.8
Number of case series	-	1	-	4	5	2.7
Number of policy/brief reports	-	1	-	2	3	1.6
Number of teaching articles	-	1	1	-	2	1.1
Number of perspectives/ opinions	-	-	-	1	1	0.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>185</b>	<b>100</b>

\* Dealing with various themes, mostly focusing on broad child health issues

Nearly three-quarters (74%) multi-authored and over three-quarters (77.6%) were from Addis Ababa (Table 2). About one-fifth (21.5%) were from institutions of higher education outside Addis Ababa, one-half of which were from Gondar and Jimma universities.

Only 10 (5.4%) of them were from other locations within Ethiopia and one (0.5%) from overseas (India). A majority (86.5%) of the published articles were from academic or affiliated teaching institutions. Of note there were none from research institutions.

Table 2. Articles published in the Ethiopian Journal of Pediatrics and Child Health

Variable	Number	Percent
<b>Authorship</b>		
Single	48	26
Multiple	137	74
Total	1185	100
<b>Address of first author</b>		
Addis Ababa	145	77.6
Gondar	10	5.4
Jimma	10	5.4
Mekele	2	1.1
Haromaya	2	1.1
Arba Minch	2	1.1
Adama	1	0.5
Ambo	1	0.5
Sodo	1	0.5
Mizan Tepi	1	0.5
India	1	0.5
Other	9	5.4
Total	185	99.6
<b>Affiliation of first author</b>		
Academic and affiliated institutions	160	86.5
Non-academic public institution	8	4.5
Non-governmental organization	7	3.8
Government health department	6	3.2
Non-academic private institution	4	2.2
Total	185	100

Publications on HIV, TB/respiratory diseases constituted two-thirds (28/41) of the infectious disease category (Table 3). Neurologic/mental health, asthma/other respiratory cardiovascu-

lar, and renal diseases constituted three-quarters [40/54 (74.1%)] of the non-communicable articles published in EJPCH.

Table 3 . Articles published in the Ethiopian Journal of Pediatrics and Child Health by disease/condition category (2005-2024) by selected variables (2005-2024)

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Number*</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Neonatal problems	37	21.4 <sup>‡</sup>
<b>Infectious diseases</b>		
HIV and other STDs	14	34.1
Vaccine preventable diseases	7	17.1
TB and other respiratory diseases	7	17.1
Malaria	3	7.3
Parasitic infections	3	7.3
Other infections	7	17.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Non-communicable diseases</b>		
Neurological & mental health	11	20.4
Asthma and other respiratory	10	18.5
Cardiovascular diseases	10	18.5
Kidney and urologic diseases	9	16.6
Neoplastic diseases	7	13
Diabetes and other endocrine	3	5.6
Gastrointestinal disorders	3	5.6
Anemia and other hematologic diseases	1	1.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Other conditions</b>		
Health systems research	22	53.7
Nutrition/Malnutrition	10	24.4
Ophthalmic/dental/ENT	3	7.3
Ped Surgical problems	2	4.9
Community-based surveys	2	4.9
Growth and development	1	2.4
Violence against children	1	2.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>100</b>

\* Does not include topics covered by the 22 editorials, while the editorials were counted and included in the published articles.

<sup>‡</sup>N=173 - neonatal problems [37 (21.4%), infectious diseases 42 (23.%), non-communicable diseases 54 (31.2%), other conditions 41 (23.7%)

Some observations on the overall themes covered and the implications of the articles published in the Journal over the two decades include:

- Non-communicable diseases comprise about one-third of the publications, which might signify their importance in subsequent research, childcare, and policy interventions
- Publications on neonatal health also constitute nearly one-third of the publications, including innovative approaches and strategic interventions requiring scale-up while additional research continues.
- Communicable diseases, particularly diarrhea, pneumonia/acute respiratory infections, and malaria, accounted for over one-fifth of the publications and high adverse outcomes/ mortality, suggesting that intensive research and intervention need to continue
- Malnutrition and its impact on growth and development have continued unabated, as suggested in the published data and information, requiring due attention
- Some publications also indicate that effective and efficient interventions, such as Integrated Management of Newborn and Childhood Illness, are well underway in Ethiopia and must be pursued vigorously.
- Publications on health systems and community surveys suggest the need of more of this type of research to further support research and childcare interventions.

- Key issues covered by editorials reflecting the positions of the editorial board, such as child healthcare, the HIV issue in children, ethics issues in pediatric research, and others, might inform further research and intervention planning.

### **EJPCH accreditation and indexing**

Addis Ababa University included EJPCH among its list of reputable journals in November 2019. The Journal was included among the list of reputable journals that met the criteria set by the Ethiopian Science and Technology Commission and the Ethiopian Academy of Sciences and received the official recognition in August 2024.

The EJPCH in international and national accredited databases: EJPCH was included in the Ethiopian Journals Online (EJOL) (17) on April 4, 2016, Scopus on January 1, 2019 (18), and the African Journals Online (AJOL) on May 15, 2022 (19). Articles published in the Journal are assigned Digital Object Identifier (DOI) Since July 2016, the publication has been recorded in the ISSN register, numbers ISSN 2413-2640 for print and ISSN 2519-0334 for online publication. EJPCH has not been listed in Clarivate Analytics or other major impact factor databases.

### **EJPCH editorial boards**

Overall, 29 EPS members have served on the Editorial Board of the Journal over the 20 years of the Society's existence (Table 4), of which three members led the Journal as Editors-in-Chief: Professor Damte Shimelis for 10 years

(2025 not included), Professor Amha Mekasha for two years. Dr. Henok Tadele has been Co-Editor-in-Chief, 2020 – to date. for eight years, and Professor Bogale Worku

<b>Editor-in-Chief</b>	<b>Co-Editor-in-Chief</b>	<b>Members</b>	<b>Year</b>
Amha Mekasha	-	Abubaker Bedri, Tilahun Teka, Tesfaye Tessema, Abebe Gebremariam	2005
		Abubaker Bedri, Tilahun Teka, Tesfaye Tessema	2006-2008
		Assaye Kassie, Sirak Hailu, Tedbab Degife	2009
Bogale Worku	-	Amha Mekasha, Kindu W/Michael, Kassahun Mitiku	2010
		Amha Mekasha, Kindu W/Michael, Kassahun Mitiku	2011
		Tigist Bacha	
Amha Mekasha	-	Bogale Worku, Kassahun Mitiku, Kindu W/Michael, Damte Shimelis, Mulugeta Betre, Tigist Bacha	2012-2014
		Kindu W/Michael, Kassahun Mitiku, Tigist Bacha, Damte Shimelis, Mulugeta Betre. Negussie Deyassa, Bogale Worku	
Damte Shimelis	-	Birkneh Tilahun, Tsinuel Girma, Kassahun Mitiku, Tigist Bacha, Mulugeta Betre, Negussie Deyassa	2015
	-	Etsegenet Gedlu, Nigussie Deyessa, Birkinah Tilahun, Tsinuel Girma, Mulugeta Betre, Tigist Bacha	2016
		Henok Tadele, Sileshi Lulseged, Abate Yeshidinber, Workabeba Abebe, Netsanet Workineh, Fitsum Woldegebriel, Refiloe Masekela	2017
		Henok Tadele, Sileshi Lulseged, Abate Yeshidinber, Workabeba Abebe, Netsanet Workineh, Fitsum Woldegebriel. Refiloe Masekela	2018
		Sileshi Lulseged, Etsegenet Gedlu, Wubegzer Mekonnen, Birkinah Tilahun, Workabeba Abebe, Tsinuel Girma	2019
	Henok Tadele	Sileshi Lulseged, Etsegenet Gedlu, Tsinuel Girma, Workabeba Abebe.	2020
		Sileshi Lulseged, Abate Yeshidinber, Gudina Egata, Workabeba Abebe. Tsinuel Girma	2021
		Sileshi Lulseged, Abate Yeshidinber, Gudina Egata, Workabeba Abebe	2022-2024
Mohammed Feyisso		Managing Editor	2021-2024
Rebecca Zewdie		Production Assistant	2021-2024

Pediatric and public health professions that served as the Advisory Board members of EJPCH include Professor Dereje Kebede, Dr. Getachew Teshome, Professor Amha Mekasha, Prof. Demissie Habte, Professor Lulu Muhie, Dr. Tigist Ketsela.

### **Challenges, opportunities and prospects**

The publication of the Journal solely depended on EPS, which had to struggle to survive as a professional society, including in securing financial resources. The relatively limited number of pediatricians and child health specialists in the country, as well as the underdeveloped culture and motivation for scientific publishing, were major constrained. More robust outputs from research conducted in the existing academic and research institutes were submitted to well-established and reputable journals overseas, and to a lesser extent to local journals established in-country by other professional associations.

Since there were various challenges to the Journal in its formative years, the dedication and contributions of the enlightened members, the diligent work of its editorial boards over the years, and the continued and rigorous support from EPS were decisive opportunities that helped EJPCH to thrive. In 2012, to encourage young researchers, EPS allotted an award of Birr 45,000 to the winning research output. In addition, the Society organized capacity-building manuscript write-up workshops as part of its annual conferences.

With the increase in the flow of article submissions by September 2013, the Editorial Board prepared a list of thematic reviewers by pediatric sub-specialties and enlisted their support to alleviate the challenges in timely and quality reviewing of manuscripts. The challenges with peer reviewing will likely continue, requiring dynamic and innovative approaches and adjustments to be employed by the board and the parent Society.

EPS and the Board need to encourage academic institutions to maintain and increase their contributions, attract and engage research institutes and private health facilities as well as health facilities in the regions. Mechanisms to engage international contributors need to be in place and corresponding editors could help in promoting this as one of their major contributions.

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