

The Croatian War of Independence (1991–1995) in medical literature: a 32-year scientometric review of the *Croatian Medical Journal*

Damir Sapunar¹ ,
Danira Matijaca¹ ,
Mariia Shmatkova² ,
Leonarda Gambiroža¹ ,
Irma Nina Orlandić¹ ,
Matko Marušić¹ , Ana
Marušić¹ 

¹ University of Split School of Medicine, Split, Croatia

² University of Split, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Split, Croatia

Correspondence to:

Damir Sapunar
University of Split School of Medicine,
Šoltanska 2A, 21000 Split, Croatia
ds@mefst.hr

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Aim: To evaluate the scientometric characteristics of articles related to the Croatian War of Independence (1991–1995) published in the *Croatian Medical Journal (CMJ)* by analyzing citation trends and identifying key contributions to medical and societal research during and after the War (1991–2024).

Methods: We manually identified war-related articles from the *CMJ* website and screened them based on their titles and abstracts. We then retrieved their citation data using the Clarivate Web of Science and analyzed their citation metrics, journal impact factors (IF), and quartiles. Articles were categorized by research focus, publication type, and citation frequency.

Results: *CMJ* published 301 war-related articles, most of which appeared in 1992. They acquired 2,544 citations, primarily in Web of Science-indexed journals, with 68.9% of citations occurring in international journals. The majority of citations were from journals in the third quartile (32.4%), with only 2.3% occurring in top-tier journals (IF > 10). Key research topics included the psychological impacts of war (e.g., PTSD), public health, and healthcare system reorganization. Articles on secondary traumatic stress in war veterans' families, systematic rape during the war, and advancements in forensic DNA analysis were among the most cited articles, with individual citation counts of 78, 76, and 73, respectively.

Conclusion: *CMJ* played an important role in documenting the medical and societal impacts of the War of Independence, advancing knowledge on psychological trauma, healthcare organization during the war, and human rights issues. Despite modest representation in high-impact journals, the articles made visible contributions to global discussions on war-related health research. *CMJ*'s innovative editorial policies, including its author-supportive pre-review process, fostered excellent research during and after the war. This analysis emphasizes the importance of *CMJ* in addressing the multifaceted consequences of the war, both as a platform for scholarly collaboration and as a repository of historical and educational value.

Keywords: Croatian War of Independence; *Croatian Medical Journal*; scientometric analysis

Introduction

Wars have a destructive power that profoundly affects scientific research, uniting researchers from various countries and disciplines, fostering collaboration, and accelerating scientific progress (1). For example, fields like engineering and physics experienced rapid development during the Second World War (1). However, wars can also negatively impact research, publishing activity, and the scientific interests of researchers in the affected regions (2).

Over time, the volume of publications on war-related topics has increased, reflecting a growing interest in its societal and medical consequences (3). However, the influence of such studies on scientific advancements and their long-term effects are still being explored. Despite an overall increase in publication rates, the proportion of war-related research appearing in high-impact journals tends to decline during peacetime (3). These topics therefore remain underrepresented, highlighting a need for researchers and editors to address this gap and pay more attention to studies with implications for war (3).

Despite being essential to understanding the influence of these works within the academic community and their practical impact on the relevant fields, very few citation analyses of war-related scientific articles have been conducted to date. Such bibliometric and scientometric explorations provide insights into the specific areas of research and could help identify the impact of war-related research and its intersections with health and social issues. These approaches can also highlight shifts in the publishing activity and research priorities driven by conflict, particularly among scholars in war-affected regions. Citation metrics, including the number of times an article is referenced by others, could also serve as indicators of an article's influence within the field.

Here we evaluate the impact of war-related articles published in the *Croatian Medical Journal (CMJ)*, an open-access, peer-reviewed journal that played a key role in documenting the impact of the Croatian War of Independence (1991–1995) on the health of the affected populations and regions. From its inception, *CMJ* has mainly focused on the areas of Croatia and Southeastern Europe, and has fostered the international visibility of Croatian medical research and supporting the integration of Croatian science into global academic networks (4, 5). By analyzing citation patterns and research trends, we aim to provide a comprehensive overview of studies on the consequences of the Croatian War of Independence (1991–1995). This analysis could highlight key contributions that have shaped the field, identify any significant scientific advancements, and demonstrate the broader influence of war-related research within the scientific community.

Methods

Data source and retrieval

Two authors (LG, INO) retrieved the articles published in *CMJ* related to the War of Independence in Croatia and manually screened their titles and abstracts for relevancy. They consulted a third author (DS) in cases of ambiguity and then screened the entire ar-

ticle. The period under investigation spanned from 1992, when the first papers related to the Croatian War of Independence were published, to May 2024, when the data from the citation database were extracted. The first supplement to the first *CMJ* volume in 1992 was published in 1991, as the journal covered the beginning of the War in 1991 (4). The full text of articles contained in *CMJ* supplements is available on the Journal's website (5).

We extracted the title, authors, year of publication, volume, issue number, and page numbers for the selected publications, as well as their type (editorial, review, or original research work), research field of the published articles, and potential international collaboration. The research fields were assigned to the individual articles by consensus of all authors.

Citations search strategy

We queried 'All Databases' in the Clarivate Web of Science (WoS) in May 2024 using the "Cited References" option to retrieve the citations of the included articles. We selected this database as it is a multidisciplinary research platform providing access to high-quality, peer-reviewed scientific publications and citation indexes, covering journal articles, doctoral dissertations, book chapters, patents, conference proceedings, research data, peer reviews, and more (6).

The citation search was conducted in two phases by one author (DM), where the search strategy was based on the article title (i.e., field: title) in the first phase and expanded to include the first and last names of the authors (i.e., field: Author) in the second phase.

Data collection

After collecting all articles that cited *CMJ* publications with war-related topics, we grouped them into four categories: articles in journals indexed in the Journal Citation Reports (JCR) with assigned quartiles and impact factors; articles in non-JCR-indexed journals and JCR-indexed journals without assigned quartiles and impact factors; dissertations; and book chapters.

The JCR is a leading resource for evaluating and comparing scholarly journals, providing impact factor (IF) and quartile data since 1997 (7). As of June 2021, all journals indexed in the JCR database are included through the following citation databases: the Science Citation Index Expanded, the Social Sciences Citation Index, the Emerging Sources Citation Index, and the Arts & Humanities Citation Index.

For articles in JCR-indexed journals, we extracted the citing publications, as well as their IFs and quartiles for the year of publication. For articles published in 2023 and 2024, we used the most recent available IF and quartile data (from 2022). For papers published before 1997, we retrieved the IF data from available online sources and digitized printed editions of the Science Citation Index. We determined the articles' quartiles manually based on the ranking of each journal (determined by its IF) within its respective category and categorized them into two groups: top-category articles ($IF > 10$) and excellent articles ($4 < IF \leq 10$). The group of articles published in non-JCR-indexed journals did not have as-

signed quartiles or IF and also included JCR-indexed journals that were listed in the database, but lacked both IFs and quartiles.

We presented the analyzed data as frequencies and percentages or medians and interquartile ranges (IQRs), with calculations done in Excel (Microsoft Corporation, Microsoft Excel for Windows, Version 2411 Build 16.0.18227.20082).

Results

During the analyzed period, *CMJ* published 301 articles related to the War of Independence – 64 in War-related supplements (11 in the first and 53 in the second supplement) and 237 in regular journal volumes (**Figure 1**). Most were published during the war in 1991 and 1992.

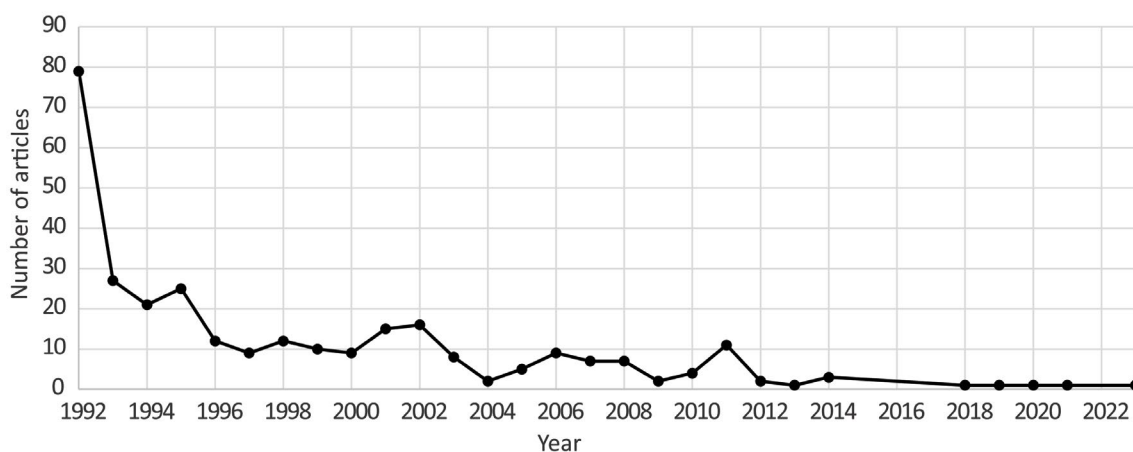


Figure 1. Annual number of articles published from 1992 to May 2024 related to the 1991–1995 War of Independence. Although the first supplement to the inaugural issue of the *Croatian Medical Journal* was published in Autumn 1991, it was included in the 1992 volume.

The majority of the published articles were original scientific contributions ($n=218$, 72.4%), while a smaller proportion were commentaries ($n=53$, 17.6%), letters ($n=19$, 6.3%), or editorials ($n=11$, 3.7%). The original scientific articles covered a wide range of war-related topics. The majority focused on public health, the organization of health services during the war, and war crimes ($n=106$, 49.0%), followed by mental health issues and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) ($n=70$, 32.0%), war surgery ($n=33$, 15.0%), and forensic analysis and victim identification ($n=9$, 4.0%).

These articles were cited 2,544 times in WoS-indexed journals, with the highest number of citations accruing in 2002, followed by 2013 (**Figure 2**). Citations from the two war supplements account for only 9.6% ($n=245$) of all citations. Most citations were found in WoS-indexed journals ($n=2,123$, 92.3%), primarily in journals in the third ($n=688$, 32.4%), followed by second ($n=446$, 21%), first ($n=394$, 18.6%), and fourth quartile ($n=227$, 10.7%). The number of citations in top journals was only 48 (2.3%). The median IF of the citing journals was 1.2 (IQR=1.9).

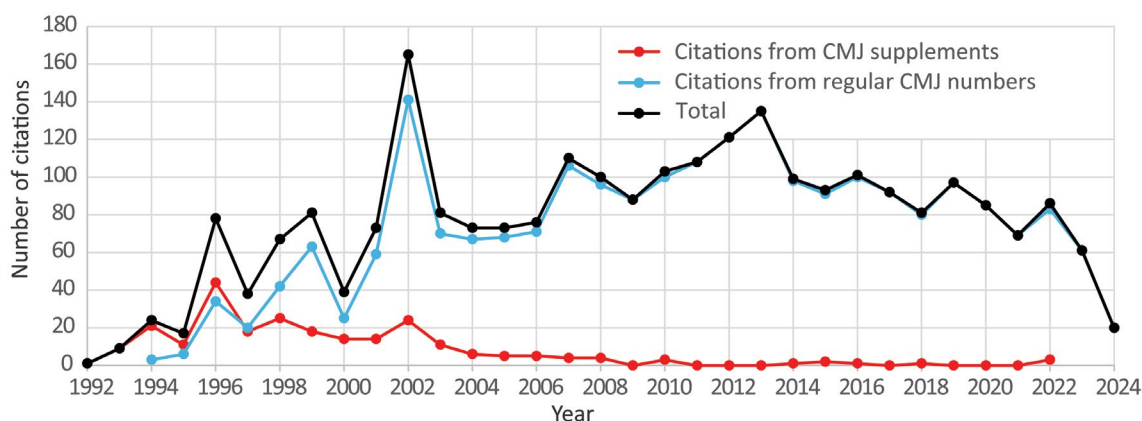


Figure 2. Citation trend of the articles related to the 1991–1995 War of Independence published in the *Croatian Medical Journal* between 1992 and May 2024.

No IF was available for 368 (17.3%) WoS-indexed journals, making it impossible to determine their quartile. The citations were predominantly found in international journals ($n = 168$, 68.9%), with about a third ($n = 78$, 32.1%) in Croatian journals. War-related articles published in *CMJ* were cited in non-indexed journals ($n = 17$, 0.2%), dissertations ($n = 154$, 6.7%), and books ($n = 5$, 0.2%).

There were 25 journals in which the *CMJ* articles related to the War of Independence were cited more than 10 times. Most of the citations were from *CMJ* itself ($n = 419$, 19.5%) and *Military Medicine* ($n = 109$, 5%) (**Table 1**). Where available, the IF of journals was low, with *The Lancet* being the only top journal in which 19 citations were found.

Table 1. Journals with more than 10 citations to the articles related to the 1991–1995 War of Independence published in the *Croatian Medical Journal* between 1992 and May 2024

Journal	No. of citations	Journal	No. of citations
<i>Croatian Medical Journal</i>	419	<i>Journal of Affective Disorders</i>	16
<i>Military Medicine</i>	109	<i>BMC Psychiatry</i>	15
<i>Collegium Antropologicum</i>	79	<i>Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease</i>	15
<i>Psychiatria Danubina</i>	79	<i>Journal of Forensic Sciences</i>	14
<i>National Medical Journal of India</i>	30	<i>Journal of Traumatic Stress</i>	13
<i>Lancet</i>	19	<i>Progress in Neuro-Psychopharmacology & Biological Psychiatry</i>	12
<i>Psychiatry Research</i>	19	<i>Disability and Rehabilitation</i>	11
<i>Društvena istraživanja</i>	18	<i>Journal of Public Health Policy</i>	11
<i>Forensic Science International – Genetics</i>	18	<i>Alcoholism Treatment Quarterly</i>	10
<i>PLOS One</i>	18	<i>American Journal of Public Health</i>	10
<i>Forensic Science International</i>	17	<i>Conflict and Health</i>	10
<i>Frontiers in Psychiatry</i>	17	<i>European Journal of Public Health</i>	10
<i>European Journal of Psychotraumatology</i>	16		

Most of the articles ($n=1,332$, 81.6%) were cited only once, while only a few ($n=12$, 0.7%) were cited more than 10 times (**Supplementary Table 1**). Most of the papers with more than 10 citations focused on the psychological consequences of the war ($n=32$), with the most common topic being PTSD ($n=22$). The second most common topic was public health ($n=12$), including two addressing the systematic wartime rape of women in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. This was followed by papers on the reorganization of the health-care system during the war ($n=8$), on the organization of surgical treatment during the war ($n=7$), on human rights violations and war crimes ($n=5$), and on the identification of victims and other forensic topics ($n=3$).

D. Kozarić-Kovačić, T. Frančišković, and M. Klarić were the most frequently mentioned authors, authoring five, four, and three papers, respectively, all related to the mental health consequences of the war.

Three articles achieved more than 70 citations (**Table 2**). The article by Frančišković et al. was the most cited one, with 78 citations. It investigated secondary traumatic stress in wives of war veterans with PTSD, finding that over a third met the diagnostic criteria for secondary traumatic stress. It emphasized the significant psychological burden on these women, often influenced by the duration of marriage and employment status, and highlighted the need to include family-oriented support in PTSD treatment plans.

Table 2. Articles published in the *CMJ* addressing the War of Independence that have received more than 50 citations

No.	Article title	No. of citations
1	Frančišković T, Stevanović A, Jelušić I, Roganović B, Klarić M, Grković J. Secondary traumatization of wives of war veterans with posttraumatic stress disorder. <i>Croat Med J.</i> 2007;48(2):177–84.	78
2	Lončar M, Medved V, Jovanović N, Hotujac L. Psychological consequences of rape on women in 1991–1995 War in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. <i>Croat Med J.</i> 2006;47(1):67–75.	76
3	Anđelinović Š, Sutlović D, Erceg Ivkošić I, Škaro V, Ivkošić A, Paić F, Režić B, Definis-Gojanović M, Primorac D. Twelve-year experience in identification of skeletal remains from mass graves. <i>Croat Med J.</i> 2005;46(4):530–9.	73
4	Priebe S, Matanov A, Janković Gavrilović J, McCrone P, Ljubotina D, Knežević G, Kučukalić A, Frančišković T, Schützwoh M. Consequences of untreated posttraumatic stress disorder following war in former Yugoslavia: Morbidity, subjective quality of life, and care costs. <i>Croat Med J.</i> 2009;50(5):465–75.	64
5	Klarić M, Klarić B, Stevanović A, Grković J, Jonovska S. Psychological consequences of war trauma and postwar social stressors in women in Bosnia and Herzegovina. <i>Croat Med J.</i> 2007;48(2):167–76.	60
6	Kozarić-Kovačić D, Kocijan Hercigonja D, Grubišić-Ilić M. Posttraumatic stress disorder and depression in soldiers with combat experiences. <i>Croat Med J.</i> 2001;42(2):165–70.	55
7	Huffine E, Crews J, Kennedy B, Bomberger K, Zinbo A. Mass Identification of persons missing from the break-up of the former Yugoslavia: Structure, function, and role of the International Commission on Missing Persons. <i>Croat Med J.</i> 2001;42(3):271–75.	55
8	Avdibegović E, Sinanović O. Consequences of domestic violence on women's mental health in Bosnia and Herzegovina. <i>Croat Med J.</i> 2006;47(5):730–41.	53

The second most cited article (Lončar et al.) received 76 citations (**Table 2**). It examined the psychological consequences of systematic rape during the 1991–1995 war in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, highlighting its immediate and long-term impacts on victims, including depression, social phobia, PTSD, and sexual dysfunctions. It emphasized the need

for targeted psychological support and documented the interplay of cultural and social factors in the survivors' coping mechanisms.

The third most cited paper (Anđelinović et al.) with 72 citations gave an overview of 12 years of experience (1993–2005) with the identification of skeletal remains from mass graves in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina using forensic methods and DNA analysis. It highlighted how the advancements in DNA technology have significantly improved the identification process, enabling positive matches for over 700 individuals, despite challenges like DNA degradation and contamination.

Discussion

CMJ played a significant role in documenting the medical and psychological impacts of the War of Independence in Croatia, publishing 301 war-related articles. The citation analysis showed that they were cited 2,544 times until May 2024, with most of the citations appearing in international journals indexed in WoS. The most-cited articles addressed topics such as secondary traumatic stress, systematic rape, and forensic DNA analysis, reflecting the significant impact of these contributions on the broader scientific community.

The high number of articles related to the War of Independence may be the result of the author-helpful policy introduced by the *CMJ* editors during the Croatian War of Independence, which showed how a scientific journal can help in times of war (8–11). The preparation of War-related supplements revealed that the main challenge for Croatian academics was not a lack of expertise, but reluctance and insufficient skills in writing for medical journals (12, 13). To address this issue, *CMJ* editors developed an author-helpful pre-review process, collaborating closely with authors to refine manuscripts and data presentation before external peer review (4, 8, 12–21). This approach became a hallmark of their work, earning them recognition in the medical journal community (10, 11, 22). The editors also encouraged Croatian academics to submit their work to other prestigious journals, resulting in the publication of around 360 articles on the medical aspects of the war in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina (11). Altogether, the author-supportive pre-review process and the respective experience significantly increased the quality of editorial work, which was subsequently transferred to research teaching in all four Croatian medical schools and thus to the entire Croatian biomedical community (18, 21, 23, 24).

In this way, *CMJ* published research on diverse aspects of wartime medicine, reported on cases of war crimes and human rights violations, and actively promoted peace through medicine (25). In November 1991, it published its first collection of War-related articles as a supplement, covering civilian deaths, child casualties, displacement, war trauma, refugee health, ethnic violence, destruction of medical facilities, and the Croatian Medical Corps' efforts. Most of the articles in our citation analysis focused on the psychological consequences of the war, particularly PTSD. Other important topics included public health, healthcare system reorganization, and forensic identification.

The exact impact of those War-related articles is difficult to assess. Despite the modest citation numbers in high-ranking journals, the most-cited papers addressed critical issues

such as secondary traumatic stress, systematic rape, and advancements in forensic DNA analysis. This demonstrates the Journal's contribution to war-related research and its relevance to global discussions on trauma and recovery. These articles were significant not only for educating and informing the medical community (26), but also as valuable historical records for Croatia itself. The modest number of citations is likely due to the *CMJ* not being indexed in major journal databases at the time, giving it little visibility in the global scientific community.

These findings highlight the importance of *CMJ*'s contributions during and after the war, not only in advancing scientific understanding, but also in addressing the broader societal consequences of the conflict. The Journal's ability to foster research in diverse areas emphasizes its role as a platform for addressing the multifaceted impacts of war on individuals and healthcare systems.

This study is in line with the broader goals of the Giving Voice project, which aims to support the documentation and dissemination of research on the consequences of the war in Ukraine. Similar to the *CMJ*'s efforts during the War of Independence, Giving Voice seeks to assist Ukrainian scientists in publishing war-related research and introduce them to *CMJ*'s approach to preserving historical and educational records (27). It also promotes critical scientific contributions in the fields of public health, mental health, and human rights (28).

A key limitation of this study is its reliance on citation data from a single database (WoS), which may not capture all relevant citations, especially those from non-indexed journals, dissertations, or regional publications. Additionally, the number of citations alone may not fully reflect the societal or practical impact of the published research, particularly for topics like war crimes or forensic identification, where influence may extend beyond academic citations.

This study highlights the significant role of the *CMJ* in documenting the medical, psychological, and societal impacts of the War of Independence. By analyzing citation patterns and identifying influential research, we showed the journal's contribution to global discussions on war-related research and the value of war-related research, both as a historical record and as a driver of scientific progress, emphasizing the need to support similar initiatives in other conflict-affected regions.

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ORCID

Damir Sapunar  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8352-4402>

Danira Matijaca  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9274-8766>

Mariia Shmatkova  <https://orcid.org/0009-0001-8444-8819>

Leonarda Gambiroža  <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-1949-6356>

Irma Nina Orlandić  <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-6206-931X>

Matko Marušić  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5562-1777>

Ana Marušić  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6272-0917>

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