

ORIGINAL PAPER

Geographical and temporal distribution of basic research experiments in homeopathy



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The database HomBRex (Homeopathy Basic Research experiments) was established in 2002 to provide an overview of the basic research already done on homeopathy (<http://www.carstens-stiftung.de/hombrex>). By this means, it facilitates the exploration of the *Similia Principle* and the working mechanism of homeopathy. Since 2002, the total number of experiments listed has almost doubled. The current review reports the history of basic research in homeopathy as evidenced by publication dates and origin of publications.

In July 2013, the database held 1868 entries. Most publications were reported from France ($n = 267$), followed by Germany ($n = 246$) and India ($n = 237$). In the last ten years, the number of publications from Brazil dramatically increased from $n = 13$ (before 2004) to $n = 164$ (compared to $n = 251$ published in France before 2004, and $n = 16$ between 2004 and 2013). The oldest database entry was from Germany (1832). *Homeopathy* (2014) 103, 193–197.

Keywords: Homeopathy; Basic research; Database; Fundamental research; Timeline; History

Introduction

In 1997, the conference ‘Dialogues on High Dilutional Medicine – Mechanisms of Action for Homeopathy #1’ took place in Kalamazoo, Michigan, USA – a large-scale meeting on basic research in homeopathy with many experts and officials (including representatives of the American National Institutes of Health) from all over the world. One of the aims of the conference was to evaluate what future basic research should be done to answer open questions in homeopathy. However, during the conference it already became clear that a substantial number of the participants were unaware of the huge number of basic research experiments already existing at that point of time. Accurate knowledge of this basic research is one of the crucial prerequisites for setting up a systematic pro-

gram for exploration of the working mechanism of homeopathy. Accordingly, the creation of the database ‘HomBRex’ (Homeopathy Basic Research experiments) on basic research experiments in homeopathy was announced at the subsequent conference in Santa Fe, New Mexico, USA, one year later. From then on, it took four more years until the database was introduced to the public, in 2002.¹ The database is open to any scientist or practitioner. Registration and use are free of charge (<http://www.carstens-stiftung.de/hombrex>).

After a dormant period from late 2010 to May 2012, the database was re-launched with additional search options and additional information available. Recently, the determination of each experiment’s origin and each publication’s peer review status was completed. The history of basic research experiments, as well as today’s most active countries in homeopathy basic research, are reported here.

Materials and methods

Literature for potential inclusion in the HomBRex database is identified (manually and via e-mail alerts [e.g.

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Pubcrawler]) by using databases (PubMed, DIMDI, LILACS, COST B4/ECH, Hom-Inform) and conducting searches of grey literature (Internet publications, unpublished papers, reports, abstracts and conference proceedings). In addition, reference lists of publications, hand-searching homeopathic journals, books and dissertations takes place. As a result, experiments from peer-reviewed and non-peer-reviewed sources are included in the database.

The peer-review status of each relevant journal was identified by inspection of that journal's published information or its historical peer-review status was identified from The Serials Directory,² where its presence in the Peer Reviewed Index enabled its designation 'peer-reviewed'. Books, abstracts/conference proceedings, theses/dissertations, newsletters, letters, reports and Internet reports were automatically defined as 'non-peer reviewed'.

If any information on the journal itself was not available, peer review status was designated 'unknown'.

The origin of each publication was assessed according to the affiliation of the last author of each publication. If that information was unavailable, the publication's origin was retrieved according to the following hierarchical ordering: i) last author's affiliation in other publications, ii) other author's affiliation; beginning from the second last author to the first author. In some cases, no information on any author's affiliation was given. This was exclusively the case in grey literature like local symposia reports and national yearbooks of homeopathic organisations. In these rare cases, iii) the location of the symposia or the homeopathic organisation was assigned as the origin.

Results

In July 2013, the database listed 1868 experiments in homeopathy basic research. Each experiment does not necessarily represent a single publication. Some publications contain more than one experiment and each experiment is separately listed ($n = 1383$ publications).

The oldest listed experiment was conducted in Germany and dates back to 1832. Between 1832 and 1900, 21 experiments were published, among which 17 were performed by researchers located in Germany. The four remaining experiments stem from Switzerland ($n = 1$), Hungary ($n = 1$) and Austria ($n = 2$). Therefore, all experiments in the mentioned time range originated from (at least in part) German speaking countries (Hungary was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire until 1918³).

The first basic research experiments reported in other countries date back to 1902 (France), 1922 (United States), 1936 (UK), 1968 (India) and 1982 (Brazil). [Table 1](#) lists the first appearance of homeopathy in several countries as reported in Dinges 1996,⁴ Kocizan 2005³ and Kotok 1999⁵ together with the oldest experiments listed in HomBRex. Germany is not included in [Table 1](#), because 'first appearance of homeopathy' in Germany certainly depends on the point of view (e.g. Cinchona bark experiments in 1790,⁶ the publication from 1796 in 'Hufelands Journal der praktischen Arzneykunde'⁶ or the first publication of the 'Organon der Heilkunst' in 1810⁶).

Table 1 First appearance of homeopathy and first basic research experiments in various countries

| Country | First appearance* | First experiment |
|-----------------|-------------------|------------------|
| Austria | 1816 | 1842 |
| France | 1819 | 1902 |
| Hungary | 1820–1830 | 1876 |
| Denmark | 1821 | 2012 |
| Italy | 1822 | 1986 |
| Poland | 1822 | 1993 |
| Russia | 1824 | 1924 |
| USA | 1825 | 1922 |
| United Kingdom | 1826 | 1936 |
| Switzerland | 1827 | 1839 |
| The Netherlands | 1827 | 1972 |
| Belgium | 1827 | 1976 |
| Spain | 1827 | 1913 |
| Romania | 1830–1840 | 1935 |
| India | 1834 | 1968 |
| Brazil | 1840 | 1982 |
| Canada | 1852 | 1990 |

* 'First appearance' means, first known physician practicing homeopathy in that country or first known naming of homeopathy in written documents of that country.

Most experiments have been performed in France ($n = 364$) and published in 267 publications, followed by Germany ($n = 357/246$) and India ($n = 335/237$). Altogether, France, Germany, India and Brazil contribute about 70% of all experiments and publications. [Table 2](#) summarises the 20 countries with the most experiments/publications listed in the HomBRex database.

Activity in homeopathy basic research in France has dramatically decreased in the last 20 years. The number of new publications dropped from $n = 104$ between 1984 and 1993 to $n = 16$ between 2004 and 2013. The situation looks similar in Germany in the last 10 years, but less clear ([Figure 1](#)). On the contrary, research activity rapidly increased in Brazil in the last 10 years: 93% of the total publications from Brazil were published between 2004 and 2013. From its beginning around the 1970s, research activity was continuously high in India, with roughly 58 publications per decade beginning from 1974.

Of the 1383 publications, 439 were published after peer review. 776 were not peer reviewed and in 168 publications, no information on peer review status of the publishing journal was available. Since 1984, the percentage of peer reviewed publications steadily increased from 16% to 56% of total publications ([Figure 2](#)). At the same time, the non-peer reviewed percentage decreased while the percentage of unassignable publications remained more or less stable around 10%. In the last decade (2004–2013), 44% of publications from Brazil were peer reviewed, compared to 51% (Germany) and 56% (France). In India, the percentage of peer reviewed publications has been clearly higher since 2004 (75%).

Discussion

The determination of the origin of the experiments was based on the affiliation of the last author (see [Materials and methods](#) section). There was reasoning behind this

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