

A critical and descriptive book review of the “Dictionary of Epidemiology” authored by Carlos Henrique Mudado Malleta

Resenha crítica e descritiva da obra “Dicionário de Epidemiologia” de autoria de Carlos Henrique Mudado Malleta

Claudia Cristina de Aguiar Pereira^I, Carla Jorge Machado^{II}

Launched in 2014 by Editora Coopmed, the *Dictionary of Epidemiology*, authored by Carlos Henrique Mudado Malleta, aims at filling a gap in the Portuguese language concerning the reference books of terms related to epidemiology. The motivation for writing, as reported by the author, was to present essential concepts of epidemiology, biostatistics, and methodology, in an easily accessible language.

Unlike the *Dictionary of Epidemiology*, authored by John Last et al.¹ and updated and edited by Miquel Porta², which inspired the book and compiles terms defined by various experts in epidemiology and related fields, the author of this Brazilian dictionary performed all searches for the definitions presented in the dictionary. Therefore, the author did not receive contributions from collaborators, as opposed to the work continuously published by the International Epidemiological Association^{1,2}, which counted on nearly 200 collaborators in its latest version.

This can be considered a differentiation of this publication once it compiles the definitions and terms from a single author, enabling the standardization in the manner the terms are presented, as the same investigator performed them all. Moreover, differently from the international work, the author privileged personalities who are important to the Brazilian public health such as Oswaldo Cruz, Adolfo Lutz, and Carlos Chagas by presenting a short biography for each one of them. In Porta’s work, there are no biographies for personalities who are important to epidemiology such as John Snow, for example.

^INational School of Public Health, *Fundação Oswaldo Cruz* – Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

^{II}Department of Preventive Medicine, School of Medicine of *Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais* – Belo Horizonte (MG), Brazil.

Corresponding author: Claudia Cristina de Aguiar Pereira. Rua Leopoldo Bulhões, 1480, 7º andar, CEP: 21041-210, Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brazil. E-mail: cperreira@ensp.fiocruz.br

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The terms are presented in alphabetical order. The author provides the translation of the expression next to each term. It was possible to identify problems in some translations. For example, “eficácia,” was translated as “effectiveness.” In general, there is consensus that eficácia refers to efficacy, i.e., achieving goals in ideal conditions (e.g., in a randomized clinical trial), whereas effectiveness corresponds to “efetividade,” i.e., results obtained in real-world, uncontrolled conditions. In this regard, the work has no such differentiation. In relation to translations, the work could be improved in the use of terms such as “fertilidade,” which means “fertility,” but the author attributed “fecundity.” In Demography, the difference between the two terms is important and, therefore, cannot be interchangeable. Other terms should be revised such as the expression “casa de uma tabela,” translated as “house from a table.”

In addition to the terms used in Epidemiology and Biostatistics, the dictionary has several definitions of medical and biological terms, such as dysphagia, epistaxis, phagocytes, and fomites.

Some topics are more detailed by the author such as snakebite, which gained almost two pages in the dictionary. The researcher also presents several formulas for rates and their definitions such as maternal mortality rate and birth rate. Other issues were not included in the work, such as an explanation of “International Classification of Diseases (ICD)” or the definition of “quality-adjusted life year,” a metric that has been used in randomized clinical trials and in other types of studies. On the other hand, the author presents the definition of “disability-adjusted life year (DALY).”

The book could also be enriched by the addition of definitions of the different types of biases.

In general, the work meets the writer’s aspirations toward presenting an accessible language that could be used by undergraduate and graduate students and other professionals in their searches. The author recognizes the difficulty of a compilation work like this, given the divergence of concepts between experts, which can be a herculean task. Certainly, the choice of terms included in the book reflects the unpretentiousness that the work would be exhaustive in bringing all the terms used in Epidemiology and related fields.

REFERENCES

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