

Growing inequalities make science more of a 'winner takes all' field

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Credit: Petr Kratochvil/Public Domain

As new research documents growing inequalities in health and wealth, the gap between "haves" and "have-nots" is growing in the field of scientific research itself, says University of Michigan sociologist Yu Xie.

"It's surprising that more attention has not been paid to the large, changing inequalities in the world of [scientific research](#), given the

preoccupation with rising social and [economic inequality](#) in many countries," said Xie, research professor at the U-M Institute for Social Research and professor of sociology, statistics and [public policy](#).

The forces of globalization and internet technology have altered the intensities and mechanisms of the basic structure of inequalities in science, he points out.

In fact, Xie says, scientific outputs and rewards are much more unequally distributed than other outcomes of well-being such as education, earnings or health.

The rich get richer, he says, with eminent scientists receiving disproportionately greater recognition and rewards than lesser-known scientists for comparable contributions.

"As a result, a talented few can parlay early successes into resources for future successes, accumulating advantages over time," Xie said.

While the academic establishment defends these inequalities in a variety of ways, Xie observes that in the long run, resources and rewards must be allocated so that inequality is properly managed and controlled.

"Although [inequality](#) may incentivize scientists to make important scientific discoveries, it is especially important to invest sufficient resources in young scientists before they gain recognition," he said.

More information: "'Undemocracy': Inequalities in science," by Y. Xie , *Science*, 2014. www.sciencemag.org/lookup/doi/10.1126/science.1252743

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