



Editorial

Upholding research integrity: The role of publication ethics

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Publication ethics guidelines are made to promote honesty, transparency in the conduct of scientific research, ensure that research is carried out morally and rigorously, and prevent wrongdoing or ethics violations.¹

The Committee on Publishing Ethics (COPE), a global forum of Editors and Publishers of peer-reviewed journals, offers guidelines that define publishing ethics and guides editors on how to handle cases of research and publication misconduct.²

This editorial is intended to guide researchers on various principles of publication ethics to ensure integrity in research conduct and publication, described as follows:-

1. Importance of Ethics Approval, Informed Consent, and Data Confidentiality

1. Authors and researchers must follow ethical norms while planning for a research study.
2. Guidelines of Good Clinical Practice, and the Declaration of Helsinki, should be followed in the conduct of research.³
3. Authors must obtain informed consent from all study participants. The process of documentation involved in obtaining informed consent should never be neglected. Industry-sponsored randomized clinical trials involve Audio-visual consent. Consent papers must state that patients' identities and other confidential information (such as socioeconomic

status) would be protected. Consent papers must comprehensively state patient rights in language that patients understand.

4. While submitting a manuscript for publication, the Journal editorial boards may request written proof of consent forms and therefore, should be kept for a minimum of 5 years after the completion of the study.

2. Ethical Misconduct: Research Fraud and Data Manipulation

1. Research fraud is committed when publications present findings and conclusions based on data that was either fabricated (not produced by the study) or falsified (manipulated).
2. Research fraud can be easily detected by carefully observing the statistics by expert editors and reviewers, and if doubted, they might ask the authors to provide the raw data sheets to allay or confirm their concerns. Regarding this, editors may request research datasheets even years after publication. Therefore, all Clinical study related research data should be stored for a long period.

3. Ethical Misconduct: Simultaneous Submission

1. Simultaneous submission refers to submitting an article to multiple scientific journals at the same time.

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2. Most journals, at the time of submission, need authors to declare that it is original and not under consideration by other scientific publications.
3. Ignoring the declaration step by journals may result in submission to a journal with higher chances of acceptance. This could result in the double publication of the same research work in two different journals.
4. Authors must submit to one journal and wait for a decision before submitting to another Journal, as this misconduct is solely their responsibility.
5. Paper/Poster presentation at scientific conferences can also be published in a peer-reviewed journal.

4. Ethical Misconduct: Plagiarism

1. Plagiarism is the most common type of scientific misconduct in manuscript writing.
2. Plagiarism occurs when an author uses the work of any other author/s in research publications/books, etc, without the approval, credit, or acknowledgment of another author/s, and fraudulently presents it as his work.
3. Plagiarism is classified into two types based on the amount of content reproduced (a) COPE defines clear plagiarism as the unattributed use of large portions of text and/or data presented as if they were written by the plagiarist, and (b) minor copying of short phrases only (e.g., phrases in a research paper discussion) without any data fabrication.
4. Plagiarism can be of various forms, including literal copying, substantial copying, paraphrasing, recycling, and self-plagiarism.
5. Acknowledging earlier authors' work is important for contextualizing one's research.
6. The COPE provides comprehensive rules for addressing plagiarism during & after the review process, and when detected after publication.
7. Plagiarism checking software helps editors discover plagiarists and prevents publications of manuscripts having plagiarised content.

5. Ethical Misconduct: Duplicate Publication

1. Duplicate publication is defined as submission of a new manuscript with the same content as mentioned in the previously published manuscript.
2. This is comparable to plagiarism, except that it uses the identical information, pictures, and research premise from another work rather than paraphrasing it.
3. Duplicate publications are divided as major and minor violations under the COPE.
4. A major violation is publishing the same dataset with the same results and attempting to conceal duplication,

such as changing the title or author order or failing to mention previous work.

5. A minor violation, often termed as "Salami slicing," is defined as duplicate publication that includes some repetition.
6. For duplicate publications, authors frequently turn to regional or non-English journals.
7. Authors must abstain from this misconduct and admit when it is unethical.
8. In addition to rejecting and revoking duplicate publications, the COPE provides particular guidelines for handling duplicate publications.
9. If a researcher conducts a study, keeping the study hypothesis the same, then conducting a follow-up confirmatory investigation with a larger sample size and without using previously published data is not considered to duplicate publishing.

6. Ethical Misconduct: Self-citation

1. Citing one's own published work in subsequent papers that are unrelated to the original research is known as self-citation. For experienced scholars, a work's citation count may be more significant than its actual publication.
2. Authors indulge in the practice of self-citations as a number of times a research work is cited, is used to calculate researcher G and H index, which influences academic promotions of researchers.
3. The scientific community considers self-citation as unethical
4. However, in some cases, self-citations are unavoidable when authors already published a substantial body of work in their particular subject, and the succeeding paper is a continuation of prior papers.
5. However, authors should not use topics outside the subject of the current publication to cite their previous work.

7. Publication Ethics with Authorship

"Each author who has contributed in the research should be listed for authorship." - International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE).

ICMJE defines three fundamental conditions that must be met collectively to be attributed with authorship.⁴

1. The author must have contributed significantly to the study's conception, design, data acquisition, statistical analysis, and interpretation.
2. The author has contributed in drafting or revision of the paper for intellectual content.
3. The author has contributed in the approval of the final version.

- a. The level of contribution in the research determines the ranking of the authors. However, the sequence of authors, particularly the first and corresponding authors, can sometimes lead to dissatisfaction and disagreement among researchers.
- b. Study group should meet at the start of the study, and address authorship issues, and prepare a document that assigns distinct work based on authorship

The three major types of misconduct with authorship are ghost authorship, gift authorship, and guest authorship.

- a. *Ghost authors* are those who contribute significantly to a study but are not credited or acknowledged in the publication. These are usually paid authors, who should be acknowledged if authorship is not declared.
- b. *Gift authorship* refers to inclusion in a list of co-authors solely based on affiliation with the research institute. Gift authorship is sometimes awarded to university or department administrators, even if they have not made significant contributions to the work.
- c. A *guest author* is someone who is listed as an author but did not contribute significantly to the design, research, analysis, or writing of the work.
- d. Changes in authorship (addition/removal) after acceptance or sometimes after publishing are permitted provided all co-authors agree to this amendment and have individually signed the requisition sent to the editor of the journal.

8. No Conflicts of Interest

Conflicts of interest, also known as conflicting interests, refer to financial, personal, or social factors that may influence an author's behaviour regarding a manuscript.⁵

Consequences of non-adherence with Publication ethics, if detected

1. The COPE establishes explicit criteria and procedures to be done when any of the aforementioned misconducts are discovered.⁶

2. The editorial board first contacts writers to inform them of misconduct. If the authors confess, then the research work is rejected and the Institution's Head is informed. In case of already published papers, the authors are given an option to apologize through an erratum to the Editor of the journal. If the misbehaviour is serious, the editor has the power to revoke the paper after due interrogation is completed and the misconduct is proven
3. The journal can blacklist authors and communicate this information with COPE, informing all member journals. If authors deny their misbehaviour, editors may take notice and take appropriate action by the COPE principles.
4. Local ethical committees can also question authors and impose appropriate punishments based on conventional processes.

9. Conflict of Interest

None.

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