

PUBLISHING ETHICS

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Publishing Ethics

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overview

In the past decade, India has made rapid strides in contributing scholarly content to global research output and currently accounts for about 88 per cent of scholarly publications from South Asia. Although there has been a visible spurt in the quantity of scholarly publications from India, the average quality of research output remains low. Instances of research misconduct, including but not limited to data fabrication, falsification and plagiarism are aplenty. In such a scenario, there is need for the Indian research community to focus on publishing ethics to be at par with international standards.

Research and innovation are the key sources of competitive advantage for a society and help in its overall economic, social and cultural well-being. Successful reporting and publication of research adds to the existing pool of knowledge and helps in developing future hypothesis and dialogue to benefit the community and society at large.

A sound research environment requires the active support of all stakeholders in the research lifecycle. Researchers who are at the heart of this ecosystem, shoulder a greater responsibility in the reporting of research. This booklet is a handy guide for researchers and academia. It provides clear guidelines on ethical practices for conducting and reporting research.

Key influencers like research institutes and universities, will find the overview of the policy framework and guidelines helpful in creating a conducive environment for ethical research practice.

publishing your research

Responsible communication of research depends upon the adherence to guidelines on authorship, acknowledgement, data integrity, appropriate permissions, and being mindful of potential conflicts of interest that may arise while reporting a research.

AUTHORSHIP

Who is an author?

An author is someone who has made a significant contribution to the work reported: in terms of research conception or design, or acquisition of data, or the analysis and interpretation of data.

Who is a co-author?

A co-author is someone who has made a significant contribution to an article and who equally shares the responsibility and accountability for results.

If an article is written by more than one author, you'll choose one person to be the corresponding author, who would handle correspondence and sign the publishing agreement on behalf of all the authors. He/she is responsible for ensuring that all authors' contact details are correct.

An exploratory study on Indian research misconduct reported that 55.4% misconduct is that of offering gift authorship.

(Source: Dhingra and Mishra. 2014. IJME. 11(2), 104. Accessed on 8 April 2019).

Who is responsible for the contents of a paper?

The researchers who have substantially contributed to the conceptualisation, design, investigation, data analysis, drafting or revising of an article would be called as the authors of the paper. All authors named on the paper are equally accountable for the content of a manuscript or a published paper.

In addition to being accountable for parts of the work, an author should be able to identify which co-authors are responsible for a specific part of the work. Authors should also have confidence in the integrity of the contributions of their co-authors.

DATA MANAGEMENT

What are the factors to be taken care of when reporting research data?

Responsible data collection and reporting is paramount to a sound publication of a scholarly article. Researchers and authors need to be aware of effective data management practices and the norms for handling data in their disciplines. It is important to ensure accuracy and trustworthiness of data to avoid infringement of any form.

The Office of Research Integrity in the USA recognises data management as an essential requirement for all stages of research in order to maintain data integrity. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Identifying appropriate sources and methodologies for collection of data;
- Obtaining relevant legal or ethical permissions for working with a set of data sources like human and animal subjects;
- Following good laboratory practices and experimental guidelines by adequately trained research staff;
- Using relevant technologies for recording and analysing the data; and
- Accurate reporting of the data.

The *Journal of Cell Biology* has looked at the problem of data manipulation and estimates that up to 20% of accepted papers contain questionable data. *(Source: Beautification and fraud. Nature Cell Biology, 8, 101–2. Accessed on 8 April 2019).*

PERMISSIONS

Do I need permission if I use any material from my own work?

Yes, you will need to check who owns the copyright of the original work and ask for permission to reuse the material.

What do I need to be mindful of when using third-party material in my article?

You must obtain the necessary written permission to include material in your article that is owned and held in copyright by a third party, including—but not limited to—any proprietary text, illustration, table, or other material: data, audio, video, film stills, screenshots, musical notation, and any supplemental material.

"Our publication numbers have increased; we are getting more and more submissions every year, but we are accepting a smaller and smaller fraction of them. And I think the submissions are far lesser quality than they were years ago, so we are still only accepting the best quality ones."

— Dr David Everett, Editor, *International Dairy Journal*

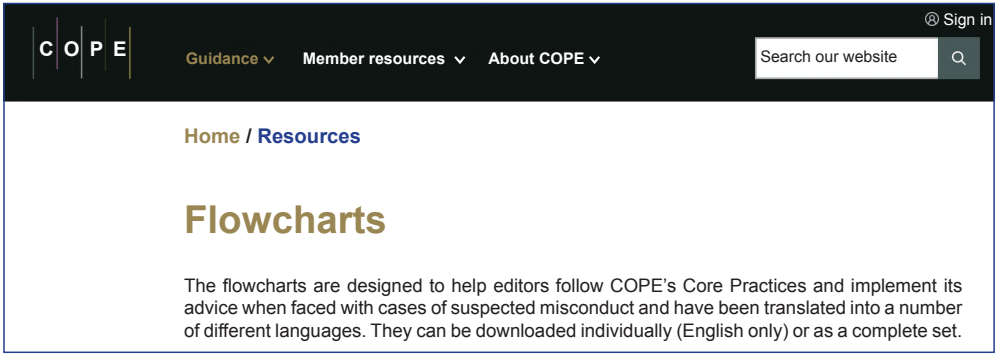
CONFLICT OF INTEREST

What is conflict of interest?

A conflict of interest can occur when you (or your employer or sponsor) have a financial, commercial, legal, or professional relationship with other organisations, or with the people working with them, that could influence your research. It could be any situation which can potentially bias how the researcher conducts or reports their research, or how a researcher's work might be assessed by an institution or their peers.

For example, a case of a researcher working in the area of drug discovery, also owning stock or shares in a pharmaceutical company could be a potential conflict of interest.

Full disclosure is required when you submit your work for publication. This information will be used to inform the editorial decisions and may even be published to assist readers in evaluating the article.



Source: http://publicationethics.org/resources/flowcharts

common ethical issues: faqs

Some of the common ethical issues that the authors need to be aware of when publishing their research are potential authorship disputes, issues of data and image manipulation, duplicate submissions, plagiarism and copyright infringement.

WHAT IS CONSIDERED AS UNETHICAL AUTHORSHIP?

The following forms of authorship are considered unethical:

- **Gift (guest) authorship**: Where someone is added to the list of authors when he/she has not been involved in the writing of the paper.
- **Ghost authorship**: Where someone has been involved in writing the paper but is not included in the list of authors.

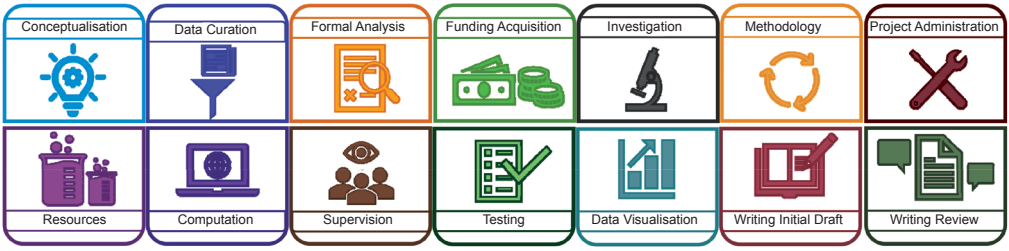
HOW TO REDUCE AUTHORSHIP-RELATED PROBLEMS?

It is preferable to raise the subject of authorship right at the beginning. You should start gathering views of all team members and if possible, discuss authorship in a face-to-face meeting. To ensure that all contributions to

the study have been recognised and included, the academicians can use the CRediT. Using the CRediT system to list authors in the publication would help bring greater transparency and clarity to the role played by each author in the research.

Contributor Roles

To ensure that all contributions to the study have been recognised and included, the academicians can use the Contributor Roles Taxonomy (CRediT). CrediT is high-level taxonomy, including 14 roles, that can be used to represent the roles typically played by contributors to scientific scholarly output. Using the CRediT system to list authors in publication would help bring greater transparency and clarity to role played by each author in the research.



Source: www.casrai.org/credit

WHAT IS PLAGIARISM?

According to the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), plagiarism is when somebody presents the work of others (data, words, or theories) as if they were his/her own and without proper acknowledgement.

One should ensure the following when citing others' (or your own) previous works:

- Mark quoted text reproduced verbatim from another source with quotation marks.
- Attribute and reference the source of the quotation within the text and in the References section.
- Obtain permission from the original publisher and rightsholder when using previously published figures or tables.

An investigative study showed that between 1992–2017, 545 papers published by Indian authors were retracted due to use of unattributed text.
(Source: Manupriya. 2017. www. IndianBioscience.org. Accessed on 8 April 2019).

HOW TO AVOID SELF-PLAGIARISM?

Self-plagiarism is the redundant reuse of your work, usually without proper citation. It creates repetition in the academic literature and can skew meta-analyses if the same sets of data are published multiple times as "new" data. If you are discussing your previous work, make sure you cite it.

HOW TO AVOID COPYRIGHT INFRINGEMENT?

There are many ways in which you can use copyrighted material without infringing copyright:

- If your use falls under a statutory exception, such as "fair use"
- Comply with existing license terms or terms of use, if available
- Request permission from the copyright owner to use the work

WHAT TO DO IF YOUR WORK HAS BEEN PLAGIARISED AND PUBLISHED?

In such a case the author should contact the Editor(s) of the Journal where the paper has been published and provide with appropriate evidences indicating that the research data is that of the authors and has been plagiarised. The complaint will be investigated further by the Editor(s) of the Journal, in consultation with the Publishers.

WHAT IS DATA MANIPULATION?

Data manipulation is the process in which scientific data is forged by deleting, adding or changing the actual collected data, and is presented unethically in a scholarly article. This can have serious implications as it may result in a distorted perception of a subject leading to incorrect theories being built and tested based on the manipulated data.

WHAT CONSTITUTES INAPPROPRIATE IMAGE MANIPULATION?

Distortion of photograph(s) representing the research findings that could misrepresent the information constitutes inappropriate image manipulation. These manipulations might range from minor adjustments which may be acceptable to severe alterations that aim to create or improve the results.

A dozen papers by two Indian researchers were retracted by a journal in 2018, due to image manipulation.

(Source: The wire: https://thewire.in/the-sciences/20-papers-by-iit-dhanbad-profs-retracted-over-duplicate-images. Accessed on 8 April 2019).

CAN I SUBMIT MY MANUSCRIPT TO TWO OR MORE JOURNALS SIMULTANEOUSLY?

Remember to submit your article to just one journal at a time, so that it will be considered by one editor and one set of reviewers at any given point in time. If you decide you want to send it to another journal, you can always withdraw your paper from the previous journal where you had earlier submitted it for review.

An investigation by the *Indian Express* newspaper revealed that more than 300 publishers of predatory journals operate out of India.
(Source: Indian Express, Inside India's fake research paper shops: pay, publish, profit. Accessed on 8 April 2019).

CAN A PAPER PRESENTED IN A CONFERENCE BE SUBMITTED TO A JOURNAL?

An author should first check if his/her paper was included in any conference proceedings. If so, the author will require permission from the publisher of the conference proceedings before publishing the paper as a journal article. Due acknowledgement must be given when the paper is submitted to the journal.

CAN A RESEARCHER USE A PUBLISHED PAPER IN THE THESIS AS A CHAPTER?

The researcher should take permission from the publisher if he/she wants to include the entire content of the published paper in his/her thesis. Parts of the research paper can be included in the thesis by providing appropriate acknowledgements.

the policy framework in india

Responsible communication of research rests heavily on responsible research practices. Academic or research integrity are thus important for advancement in any discipline.

The Office of Research Integrity, USA, defines **Research Integrity** as active adherence to the ethical principles and professional standards essential for the responsible practice of research.

> Active adherence would mean adoption of the principles and practices as a personal principle and not simply accepting them as impositions by rule makers.
>
> Ethical principles would mean honesty, trustworthiness, and high regard for the scientific record.

Research ethics are a subset of research integrity, focusing on the principle of avoidance of harm, within a statutory and regulatory framework. The ethical principles are based on the following fundamental values of research:

- **Honesty** in communicating the research plan, conducting and reporting the research;

- **Fairness** in acknowledging contributions from peers and other scholars;
- **Objectivity** in approaching the research, free from any bias or preconceived notions;
- **Reliability** of the results and quality of research;
- **Accountability** to the research community and the society; and
- **Openness** in conveying conclusions, implications, and benefits of research, and disclosing conflicts of interest.

Adherence to the principles of research integrity not only encompasses how the research has been conducted but also explains how it is communicated and disseminated by the researcher.

WHAT ARE THE POLICY FRAMEWORKS IN INDIA?

Various government organisations and institutions in India have, over time, formulated guidelines focusing on different aspects of research integrity to address issues around research and publishing ethics. Table 1 outlines some of these.

In keeping with the growing attention on the issue, an **International Centre for Publication Ethics** was set up and more recently the UGC established the **Consortium for Academic and Research Ethics** (CARE) to further awareness and ensure ethics in publication of research.

Set up in 2018, the International Centre for Publication Ethics works towards providing guidelines to researchers on publishing their research ethically in credible journals, building awareness through workshops and trainings amongst researchers, faculty members and librarians on various issues related to publication ethics—ethics in research in science, research integrity, predatory publications and publishers, open access, plagiarism and indexing databases. The centre will also be working towards providing structured courses on publishing ethics for PhD students and research scholars.

TABLE 1: POLICY FRAMEWORK IN INDIA

Organisation	Coverage of the Policy, Guidelines, and Regulations	Focus Areas for Policy, Guidelines, and Regulations
University Grants Commission (UGC)	*UGC (Promotion of Academic Integrity and Prevention of Plagiarism in Higher Education Institutions) Regulations, 2018* Higher Education Institutions	Plagiarism Awareness on Academic Integrity
All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE)	*Promotion of academic integrity and excellence and prevention of plagiarism* AICTE approved Institutions	Plagiarism Awareness on Academic Integrity
Department of Science and Technology (DST)	*Policy on Conflict of Interest* Persons applying for and receiving funding from DST Reviewers of proposals Members of Expert Committees and Programme Advisory Committees	Conflict of Interest Sanctions for Misconduct
Department of Biotechnology (DBT)	*Statement on the handling of allegations of research misconduct.* DBT supported Organisations	Addressing Cases of Research Misconduct Sanctions for Misconduct
Indian Council for Medical Research (ICMR)	*National Ethical Guidelines or Biomedical and Health Research Involving Human Participants* All biomedical, social and behavioural science research for health conducted in India involving human participants	Research Ethics for Biomedical Research on Human Subjects
Indian Council for Medical Research and Department of Biotechnology (ICMR-DBT)	*National Guidelines for Stem Cell Research* All stakeholders associated with basic and clinical research involving any kind of human stem cells and their derivatives	Ethical guidelines for research involving human stem cells and their derivatives

case studies in ethics and copyright

CASE 1

Professor Smith and Dr Jones designed a research study together and applied successfully for funding. The funding enables them to employ Pat as a research assistant. Pat carries out data collection and analyses the data. Pat then goes on to draft a paper for publication based on the results. Professor Smith and Dr Jones are impressed by Pat's work in analysing the data and drafting the paper. They decide that it does not need to be revised for any important intellectual content and, therefore submit it to a journal to be considered for publication.

Who should be the named authors on the manuscript?

Advice

Pat is the only true author of the paper. Professor Smith and Dr Jones did not contribute sufficiently to be named as authors.

Retrieved from: *Bruce Macfarlane (2017), 'The ethics of multiple authorship: power, performativity and the gift economy', Studies in Higher Education, 42:7, 1194–1210.*

CASE 2

A paper on a controversial topic from three authors was published. All three authors completed forms to say that they did not have competing interests. This was stated at the end of the paper. A reader subsequently contacted the journal to say that she had clear evidence that one of the authors had been involved in legal cases and received substantial payments for his work. The article seemed related to these legal cases.

When contacted, the author stated that they had not declared this as a competing interest as the cases were available in the public domain.

Should the authors have declared this as a competing interest?

Advice

The audience reading the research has the right to know if there were conflicting interests. If there is any doubt, it is always better to disclose. The material being available in the public domain does not exonerate an author from declaring such interests.

A statement declaring the competing interest should be published with the article.

Retrieved from: *Undeclared conflict of interest, Case Number: 00–12, Committee on Publishing Ethics. Link:* https://publicationethics.org/case/undeclared-conflict-interest

CASE 3

A book was published (in Italian) on the life of an Italian composer, assembled through analysis of his mummified remains. Author A contributed a chapter on anthropological analysis (chapter X) and author B co-authored a chapter on paleopathology (chapter Y).

A few years later, Journal C published an article (in English) co-authored by author B on the paleopathology of the same composer.

Journal C received a complaint from author A, who accused author B of plagiarising chapter X in the journal article and provided a copy of both texts with similar text highlighted (by author A).

Can plagiarism be proven if the alleged plagiarism is not reproduced verbatim from the original text, as in this case the original text was in a different language?

Advice

This is indeed a case of plagiarism. Plagiarism does not have to be word-to-word the same, and plagiarism can be proven even in two different languages.

Retrieved from: *Stolen data and omission from the authorship list, Case Number: 07–05, Committee on Publishing Ethics. Link:* https://publicationethics.org/case/definition-plagiarism

CASE 4

A case report was received at Journal A which publishes their issues in print and online. The covering letter supplied by the two authors stated that their work has not been published elsewhere and that they have been actively involved in the preparation of the paper.

During the peer review process, the journal was alerted by one of the reviewers that an exact match of the manuscript, including identical images, was found in an internet-only-pay-per-publish journal. When contacted, the authors asked if their manuscript would be considered if the publication was withdrawn from the internet journal. The Editor replied that it would not, and the submission was rejected.

Was Journal A right in doing so? Would the submission to the internet-only journal count as a prior publication?

Advice

The Editor was correct in rejecting the paper and in not considering publication if the article was withdrawn from the internet journal. Internet-only journals are the same as printed journals, and hence the paper is considered published.

Retrieved from: *Submission of an already published case report, Case Number: 17–07, Committee on Publishing Ethics. Link:* https://publicationethics.org/case/submission-already-published-case-report

further readings

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