

EDITORIAL

Application of ethics in research publication

Research involves in creating new knowledge through scientific approaches where conclusions are drawn based on observations of experiments. Research helps extend knowledge beyond what is already known. Although, different protocols, methodologies, techniques and approaches are applied in research with certain assumptions, a question arises whether all these adopting practices are in line with an acceptable ethical framework. A need of such ethical framework in conducting research and publishing findings has been understood over decades based on certain inhumane practices adopted in certain studies in the past. For example, Nazi Medical Experiments (1933 – 1945), Tuskegee Syphilis Study (1932), Willowbrook Study (1950s – 1970s) and Jewish Chronic Disease Hospital Study (1960s) were prominent among them. Considering unethical nature of these studies, it led to develop 'Ethical Codes and Regulations' in order to maintain the boundaries of research process minimizing harm to its participants while maximizing the benefits. Accordingly, some Ethical Codes and Regulations like Nuremberg Code, Belmont Report and American Psychological Association (APA) Guide were introduced.

According to Whitesides (2004), if research does not generate papers, it might just as well not have been done. Therefore, communication of research findings is a must so that the findings are accepted. On the other hand, publications are how the world sees you. It determines whether you get funding for further research or not and whether you get promoted or not. Also, it determines whether you keep your job or not. Given these reasons, publications should be resulted after research and it is the sole duty of the authors, reviewers, journalists and publishers to adhere to the ethical applications relevant to publishing of findings. Scientific publication is a team effort where authors, the journal and reviewers have to play a collaborative role. Peer review may not always be entirely independent unless otherwise the ethical adherence is not practiced by any of the above parties.

In publishing, the list of authors establishes accountability as well as the credit of the publication. A person should be listed as an author of a paper only if that person has made a direct and substantial intellectual contribution to the design of the research, interpretation of data, or drafting of the paper. Other than that, the acknowledgment section can be used to admire those who have indirectly contributed to the work. There could be two types of authorships. Sometimes, a 'Gift Authorship' is offered by including authors who did not contribute significantly to the study given the hierarchy of the institution and personal relationship. The second type is the 'Ghost Authorship' where it can see the absence of authors. Professional writers should be always avoided from the list of authors but can be acknowledged. Conversely, authors disappear in certain cases due to hierarchical/political/personal reasons and that is considered unethical.

It is obvious that, knowing or not knowing, some researchers try to maximize their publication number unethically. Salami slicing is one way of doing such where breaking up work into large number of small papers can be seen. Tiling is another way in which publishing sequence of substantially overlapping papers is promoted. Thirdly, publishing same work twice (Double publishing) or more is experienced. Therefore, it is important to have a demarcation on what is publishable and what is not acceptable for publishing. Under the former, journals like to publish papers that are going to be widely read and useful to the readers. For example, the research papers that report original and significant findings; the papers that are well organized and well written regarding how the findings relate to and advance the understanding and/or development of the subject; and the papers that are concise and yet complete in their presentation of the findings. The latter mainly pays attention on the research papers that are routine extensions of previous reports and not appreciably advance fundamental understanding or knowledge in the area; incremental/fragmentary reports of research results; verbose, poorly organized, papers cluttered with unnecessary or poor-quality illustrations; violations of ethical guidelines, including plagiarism (of others or of oneself) and questionable research practices.

In order to avoid all above misconducts, the authors have to realize their responsibility in-depth and should involve in the assigned duty. They have the responsibility in preparation and submission of manuscripts; ensuring work as a new and original research; all authors being aware of submission and agreeing with content and support submission; agreeing that the manuscript can be examined by anonymous reviewers; providing copies of related work submitted or published elsewhere, if requested by the journal; obtaining copyright permission, if figures/tables need to be reproduced; and including proper affiliation in the manuscripts and informing changes immediately if happens after submitting. More importantly, it is the responsibility of the team of researchers to decide the persons to be included as authors without any favour or biasness. Editors and reviewers should also be responsible for certain activities in fulfilling the ethical publication process. Maintaining confidentiality, not misappropriating ideas or text, emitting reviews that are justifiable and without bias, transmitting information to authors in a timely fashion, and declaring any 'Conflict of Interest' beforehand should be considered important. The reviewers should not have communications under any circumstances with the authors and it has to happen always from the editors. Overall, adopting good practices in scientific publications will help improve research culture and its existence.

Reference

Whitesides, G.M. (2004). Whiteside's paper: Writing a paper. *Advanced Materials*, 16(15): 1375-1377.

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