

Plagiarism and integrity in research

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A close link exists between research and publication. A researcher is morally obliged to publish to let others learn. If not done, all the efforts and hard work along with the funds spent will perish. An important requirement for conducting good research is ethics. This is based on trust and honesty. Throughout the process of performing research and then putting it on paper, high morals are required. Ethics is an important subject but as observed, has hardly been given its due importance. Observation has also shown that neither teachers or students take it seriously. Such teachers subsequently can not teach its importance to anyone. Most institutions of developing countries do not have specific rules and policies for conducting research. Hence, there is no guidance for students and faculty for the purpose.

Publication ethics has many arms with Plagiarism also known as Piracy stealing being an important constituent. Others include, Fabrication or Desk Top Publishing, Falsification also called Tampering and Duplication or Multiple Publication.¹⁻³

Definition of Plagiarism

Plagiarism is intellectual theft and a serious crime. The word is taken from the Latin word *plagiare* meaning to kidnap.

The encyclopedia Britannica describes plagiarism as "the act of taking the writings of another person and passing them off as one's own. The fraudulence is closely related to forgery and piracy — practices generally in violation of copyright laws."⁴

In brief, plagiarism is an act of fraud. Pechenik states, "Plagiarism has rightly been stated as one of the most serious crimes of academia,"⁵

The World Association of Medical Editors (WAME) defines plagiarism as⁶

"... the use of others' published and unpublished ideas or words (or other intellectual property) without attribution or permission, and presenting them as new and original rather than derived from an existing source."

As stated by the American College of Physicians 1998,⁷

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"The basis of science is honesty and honesty is necessary at all levels of scientific practice from project to publication. Dishonesty should not be tolerated, in fact it should be investigated and punished. Researchers should be careful, impartial, unbiased and open to investigation and the purpose of scientific research should not be self-promotion, personal publicity and financial gain."

Despite all the ethical teachings, authors do plagiarize for various reasons.

Why do authors Plagiarise?

Authors resort to plagiarism because they have pressure to publish but have additional sub threshold skills needed to be a good researcher. These include poor time management skills, a deficient ability to write any type of comprehension and a poor command on English language. English is a popular language amongst medical journals although not the only one. At times overambitious individuals cannot differentiate between right and wrong. This is found more in people with low ethical standards. Computers, soft copies of material and the internet are great supporting factors. These very factors also assist in catching such ignorant writers.

What are the Types of Plagiarism?

Word to Word: This is Copy and Paste from a published article with no referencing. It can also be lifting an entire paragraph or a graph. This is usually done in the introduction or discussion sections of a manuscript because here you either introduce your research subject from other sources or discuss it by comparison with other published material.

Mosaic

This is copying and pasting in a patchy manner. Ideas and opinions are borrowed from another source and a few words are added. No credit is given to the original author. At times mixing the two ideas can be confusing.

Paraphrasing

Taking information from another source for the introduction and re-writing in ones own words, is paraphrasing. This needs to be referenced and just changing the words cannot make it the property of the borrower. If it is not referenced it, will amount to plagiarism.

Ideas and Speech

Changing a few words here and there, or changing the order of a few words in a sentence or paragraph, is still plagiarism of ideas

Self-Plagiarism

In some situations text recycling is an acceptable practice. However in all ethical practice, authors should avoid reusing even their own previously published text. A debated exception of such usage is writing of the methodology sections of multiple manuscripts coming from a single data set. It should be done with standard scholarly conventions by using quotations and proper paraphrasing and citing the source.

Cyber-Plagiarism

Copying or downloading in part, or in their entirety, articles or research papers found on the internet or copying ideas in a similar manner and not giving proper attribution is unethical and falls in the range of cyber plagiarism.

Image Manipulation

Image manipulation is the act of altering or enhancing the quality of an image in order to present the research findings as better or important than they actually are. Images can be tampered to support findings, promote a specific technique over another, strengthen the correctness of poorly visualized findings, remove the defects of an image, and to misrepresent an image from what it really is.⁸

What is the Impact of Plagiarism?

The main person at a disadvantage is the original owner of the material. Confidence is lost on the plagiarizer. The punishments after being detected and proved can range from loss of job and demotion to loss of candidacy and reputation. At times the institution can place a penalty.

According to specific journal's policy that most scientific journals follow in accordance to the guidelines from the Committee on Publication Ethics UK, any article detected to have been plagiarized after publication is retracted from all websites and a notice is published in the next issue of the journal.⁹

How can Plagiarism be Avoided?

Faculty — Be a Role Model for your juniors

Practice ethical writing and teach your juniors how to write well and honestly. Workshops and writing sessions are helpful. Ethical writing and its importance should be made evident to the students. The dire consequences of plagiarism should be made known to all concerned.

Students and faculty members should be taught "Time Management" skills as this saves a lot of stress and prevents unethical practices

It is also essential to give credit to the good students as it provides encouragement for following the rules. It will also be an incentive for their peers to work hard to achieve more.

Every institution should have evident and clear policies on medical writing. There should be provision to use technology for checking plagiarism.

Academic integrity has to be preserved. It is governed by the way in which research is conducted and written. It is founded on the principles of respect for knowledge, truth and acting with honesty.¹⁰

Conclusion

Plagiarism is an important constituent of scientific misconduct. Authors resort to various types of plagiarism as it makes writing an article easier. They mistakenly believe that it will not be detected but it can be, even after years. When caught, the plagiarizer has to face dire consequences starting from rejection of the article or retraction if already published. The institution can take serious steps which bring disrespect to the author or even loss of an academic position.

It is the moral duty of the faculty to educate students on honesty of research and ethical writing to preserve academic integrity.

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