

# Importance of Ethical Publishing in Developing Countries

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Journal editors are responsible for the integrity of the record they publish in their journals. Thus, the ethical aspect of publishing is an important part of editorial work. Ethical publishing is particularly important in small and developing communities (1), for two primary reasons. One is that an important role for the editor and the journal is educational role in a developing scientific community that strives to join the so-called mainstream science and become visible and important in the global arena. Educating their authors in responsible publishing and responsible conduct of research in general can help editors build up the quality of their journal and the science they publish. Also, paying special attention to responsible publishing is important in a small and developing scientific community because the pressures to publish and the temptation to find an easier way to publications may be bigger. The problems of small academic communities rarely involves serious research fraud, such as falsification, fabrication and plagiarism, but rather high prevalence of irresponsible research practices, such as self plagiarism, redundant publications, salami publications, selective data publication, changing outcome measures, and improper statistics. Authorship misuse is also common, from gift to guest authors and from ghost authors to the author order on the article byline. In a recent meta-analysis we performed, the estimated prevalence of reported au-

thorship problems was around 55% for countries such as France, South Africa, India and Bangladesh, compared with 23% in USA, UK and major international journals (2).

Responsible publishing takes an effort, which may not be easy for an editor of a small scholarly, usually specialty journal in a small research community, who mostly works in isolation from other journal editors. Such an important task comes on top of other, equally important tasks that are usually quite novel for an academic not versed in scientific publishing: it is quite different to work on the other side of the manuscript submission and review process and take care of electronic publishing and indexing in bibliographical and citation databases. This is the reason why editors create associations, either local or global, that provide training, assistance, expertise, and, perhaps most importantly, standards of editorial work for journal editors.

Editors in small journals may have problems to achieve the full integrity of the articles published in their journals, mostly because of their own weaknesses as well as external threats to the integrity of the editorial work. The weaknesses and external threats to the editorial job often outweigh their strengths and opportunities provided by the global editorial community.

Perhaps the greatest strength of journal editors in preventing misconduct and fostering research integrity is the authority they have in

their own scientific community. As editors of scholarly journals, they are usually at a high academic position, where they can influence not only the authors of the journal but also the wider academic community. Together with other strengths, such as editorial independence, expertise in research integrity issues, power to formulate and implement editorial policies, and the responsibility for the integrity of the published record, editors may be the key figures in increasing the level of research integrity in the scientific community. Editors should also be ready to face and work on their own weaknesses, such as reluctance to get involved in delicate issues, lack of clear mandate for action, possible legal problems and damage to the journal's reputation, as well as shortage of staff to implement adequate procedures. They should always keep in mind that journal editors are expected to be not only the gatekeepers of good science, but of responsible science, too.

## REFERENCES

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2. Marusic A, Bošnjak L, Jeroncic A. A systematic review of research on the meaning, ethics and practices of authorship across scholarly disciplines. *PLoS ONE*. 2011; (9): e23477.

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