Editorial

Plagiarism – A Noble Misconduct

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In science, writing is the most important means of communicating research findings. In most cases, authors of the scientific fraternity report the results of their research activities in scientific journals rather than in a standard scientific paper format.[1] Scientific writing includes presentation of a number of documents that consists research related topics, new evidence based guidelines and protocols, case presentations, and review articles, which help in educating, promoting and sharing information to the professionals and also to general public.

In modern days of wide availability of resources a rising misconduct by the apparently 'noble' writers of scientific papers is 'plagiarism'. The word plagiarism is derived from Latin 'Plagiare' which means 'to kidnap'.[2] Most academic researchers reach a consensus that plagiarism is a serious breach of publication ethics.[3] The World Association of Medical Editors (WAME) defines plagiarism as – 'the use of others published and unpublished ideas or words (or other intellectual property) without attribution or permission, and presenting them as new and original rather than derived from an existing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'.[2,4] In simple words, plagiarism is the use of others' ideas or work without any credit to the original authors whether intentionally or unintentionally.[2]

Plagiarism dates back to the foundation of science communication as a discipline. According to the World Association of Medical Editors (WAME) strict definition, plagiarism is when six consecutive words are copied, or 7 to 11 words are overlapping in a set of 30 letters.[5-7]

Plagiarism has different forms but can be categorized into two general distinct categories – plagiarism of ideas and plagiarism of text (verbatim). No doubt, plagiarism of ideas is a blatant act of misconduct. Plagiarism of text and recycling of words are also a serious fault in humanities and literature where the essence of work and novelty are wordings and eloquence of the text.[8] But, there is a dilemma in scientific writing where the essence of the work is the originality of the scientific content no matter how it is presented.[9] Unlike any other author, the author of a scientific paper are ought to follow certain well-established scientific methodology and always be careful not to be affected by his or her intuition or biases that might jeopardize the judgment of a researcher.[9,10]

For a scientific paper, the author has to take sufficient time to read and understand thoroughly the main source of the article, and then he can organize into his own ideas or thoughts. Before submitting their ideas or manuscript to the journal office, the author should rewrite the article in his own words without seeing from the original source and if in any doubt, should take help of the guide/instructor.[4,11,12] Researchers and authors of scholarly papers have to follow ethical codes of Good Scientific Practice (GSP),[13] primarily based on the principles of honesty and integrity.[11] In the modern-day collaborative and multidisciplinary research, honesty of each and every author is becoming a pillar of trustworthy science.[14]

Scientists absorb new information, design new studies and publish their experimental results in various related biomedical journals. Because of the ease of using various search engines for researching resources on the internet, large numbers of published papers that contain an enormous amount of study materials can be quickly obtained. As such, plagiarism or duplicate publication may occur either consciously or unconsciously when the authors are preparing

their manuscript.[15] In fact availability of internet facilities and free online journals are the main sources of today's plagiarism among the students, faculty and researchers of any profession.[6,16-19] Unfortunately, digitalization made copy-paste plagiarism and inappropriate re-use of sources from the websites, online journals, and other electronic media widespread.[14]

According to a recent study, in a sample of 62,213 MEDLINE citations, 0.04% of cases were examples of potential plagiarism and 1.35% of cases were considered duplicate publications. After extrapolation, this corresponded to as many as 3,500 and 117,500 cases of total citations, respectively.[15]

Publications are the endpoints and fruits of research projects that are meticulously planned and executed. By claiming authorship of scholarly works, researchers get promotion and numerous other academic benefits. However, they also become responsible for what they publish and influence future publications, and science and education at large.[14] Unfortunately in the developing world, on the one hand, we lack the means of proper research training for new students, academicians, clinicians, and researchers, due to financial constraints.[20] On the other hand, regulating authorities do not have alternative mechanisms to evaluate the professional standing of an individual except an individual's publications. Hence, an undue pressure to publish exists. Also, the lack of a clear idea and understanding of what plagiarism actually is and the consequences that follow upon attempting it often lead one to plagiarize.[21]

Duplicate publication and redundant publication are misconduct and waste of resources.[22] "Readers deserve original content, and merely recycling parts of previously published work constitutes, at best, academic laziness".[3] Though it is completely true for many fields like literature, we are not pretty sure if it is also applicable to science. "Readers" of scientific papers are just looking for science presented in an appropriate format (wordings, graphs, tables, layout, etc). With enough scrutiny, one can find many typographical and grammatical errors in articles published in even prestigious mainstream journals; in most instances, most of the text can be written in more eloquent forms.[10]

Plagiarism surely deserves penalty. Since plagiarism can range from simple dishonesty to a serious misconduct, penalty depends on the severity of plagiarism. It ranges from formal disciplinary action (apology letters, retraction of the published article) to criminal charges (suspension and prosecution of authors).[23-27]

Due to the lack of knowledge on plagiarism or awareness among the authors, editors, reviewers, and educational institutions some types of plagiarized articles are allowed to publish unknowingly. All the scientific writers must check for the text duplication unintentionally by using plagiarism detection software before submitting to any journal office. Reviewers also should use plagiarism detection tools in order to avoid false publication practice and finally the editor of the journal should finalize the fate of the article based on the extent of plagiarism by using powerful plagiarism detection software. To detect plagiarism more easily, during the 80's of last century software started being developed to detect academic and scientific plagiarism. Academic plagiarism is more easily detected by the software as Turnitin and SafeAssign and scientific plagiarism with CrossCheck and eTBlast software. The software consists of algorithms to detect similarities, associated databases and web sites by which it compares the article. Sometimes simple Google Search also helps in detecting plagiarism.[28-35]

It is very easy to find information on a topic that needs to be explored, but it is not always easy to add that information to own work and not to create a plagiarism. There are several ways to avoid plagiarism:[14,36]

- Paraphrasing - Important information written in own words.
- Quote - It is literally the wording of certain authors and the sentences are always placed in quotes.
- Citation - Citing is one of the effective ways to avoid plagiarism. This usually entails the addition of the author(s) and the date of the

publication or similar information. Standard document formatting guidelines i.e. APA, MLA, Chicago, etc. are used.

- References must be listed at the end of the article which includes sources where authors found the information in the given article.
- Always follow the rules to properly cite references, acknowledging ideas taken at conference and formal/informal conversations.
- Reference must include full bibliographic information.
- Quotation marks should be used if more than six consecutive words are copied.
- Citing own material - If the author of the material used it in an earlier paper, he/she shall quote him/herself, because if this is not done, this is self plagiarism.
- The author must obtain permission from other authors/publishers to reproduce the tabular, graphic or picture attachments or used text under copyright.

In order to publish a good scientific paper, one has to make an honest effort to read the original sources thoroughly and then put down one's own ideas or thoughts in his own words with proper paraphrasing, citation and by using quotation marks where ever necessary to avoid plagiarism.[28]

Many biomedical journals have policies against plagiarism and duplicate publication because such acts of misconduct should be condemned. It should be realized that while handling, editor and reviewers of a certain journal may not be aware that a submitted paper is a duplicate one, in many cases readers or researchers in bioinformatics will eventually detect such wrongdoing. The published authors may be regarded as cheaters once they are caught because plagiarism is such a serious violation of integrity and our value as scholars, and they will be punished as such.[15]

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