What to do if you suspect redundant (duplicate) publication

(a) Suspected redundant publication in a submitted manuscript

Reviewer informs editor about redundant publication

Thank reviewer and say you plan to investigate
Get full documentary evidence if not already provided

Check degree of overlap/redundancy

Major overlap/redundancy (i.e. based on same data with identical or very similar findings and/or evidence authors have sought to hide redundancy, e.g. by changing title, author order or not citing previous papers)

Contact corresponding author in writing, ideally enclosing signed authorship statement (or cover letter) stating that submitted work has not been published elsewhere and documentary evidence of duplication

Author responds

Unsatisfactory explanation/admits guilt

Write to author (all authors if possible) rejecting submission, explaining position and expected future behaviour

Consider informing author’s superior and/or person responsible for research governance

Satisfactory explanation (honest error/journal instructions unclear/very junior researcher)

Attempt to contact all other authors (check Medline/Google for emails)

No response

Inform reviewer of outcome/action

Write to author (all authors if possible) rejecting submission, explaining position and expected future behaviour

Inform author(s) of your action

If no response, keep contacting institution every 3–6 months

Minor overlap with some element of redundancy or legitimate reanalysis (e.g. sub-group/extended follow-up/discussion aimed at different audience)

Contact author in neutral terms/expressing disappointment/explaining journal’s position

Contact author’s institution requesting your concern is passed to author’s superior and/or person responsible for research governance

Try to obtain acknowledgement of your letter

If no response, keep contacting institution every 3–6 months

Note: ICMJE advises that translations are acceptable but MUST reference the original

No significant overlap

Discuss with reviewer
Proceed with review

Note: The instructions to authors should state the journal’s policy on redundant publication
Asking authors to sign a statement or tick a box may be helpful in subsequent investigations

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