How to recognise potential authorship problems

Authorship Policies:
Clear policies (that allow for transparency around who contributed to the work and in what capacity) should be in place for requirements for authorship and contributorship as well as processes for managing potential disputes.

For further details see: publicationethics.org/authorship

Relevant COPE Cases:
Stolen Article: https://bit.ly/2nKqMhX

Relevant Flowcharts:
Suspected Ghost, Guest or Gift Authorship: https://bit.ly/2E28akf
Request for Removal of Author After Publication: https://bit.ly/2Eg31ID


Check Word document properties or tracking or comment functions, but bear in mind that there may be an innocent explanation for this

Corresponding author seems unable to respond to reviewers’ comments

Impossibly prolific author

Industry-funded study with no authors from sponsor company

Several similar articles have been published under different author names or aliases eg, a head of department as senior author

eg, a simple case report with a dozen authors or a randomised trial with a single author

This may be legitimate, but may also mean deserving authors have been omitted; reviewing the original protocol may help determine the role of employees

This may indicate guest authorship

Name on author list known to be from unrelated research area

Language quality in the manuscript does not match that of the cover letter

Bear in mind this may be legitimate if author has used language editing services

Unspecified role in acknowledgements

Individual thanked without a specific contribution

Bear in mind this may be legitimate if author has used language editing services

Name on author list known to be from unrelated research area

Unspecified role in acknowledgements

Individual thanked without a specific contribution

Bear in mind this may be legitimate if author has used language editing services

Unfeasibly long or short author list

e.g., a simple case report with a dozen authors or a randomised trial with a single author

A similarity check shows work derived from a thesis where the original author is not on the author list or acknowledged

Questionable roles of contributors

e.g., it appears that no one drafted the paper or analysed the data

This may be detected by an online search or plagiarism check

References:

Best Practice to Minimise Authorship Problems

1. SUBMIT

Adopt policies that allow for transparency around who contributed to the submitted work and in what capacity

2. ENCOURAGE

Facilitate awareness of emerging standards eg, ORCID and CRediT

3. BEHAVIOUR

Check for unusual patterns of behaviour which may suggest authorship problems

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