Introduction to publication ethics

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MODERATOR

Trevor Lane
COPE Council Member
Chair, Education Subcommittee

Trevor Lane is a publishing and education consultant based in Hong Kong. He was the managing editor of several general and specialist medical journals in Asia and the senior editor of two social science journals in the United States. From 2005 to 2015, he headed a knowledge exchange unit at the Faculty of Dentistry, the University of Hong Kong, where he taught research communication and publishing ethics to postgraduate students and helped staff publish and publicise their research.
WORKSHOP: Introduction to publication ethics

Agenda

- Introduction to COPE
- Interactive Cases
- Q & A Session
Michael Wise is a bioinformaticist/computer scientist in the Department of Computer Science & Software Engineering at the University of Western Australia. His research interests are primarily in microbial informatics. Michael co-founded the journal *Microbial Informatics and Experimentation.*

Ana Marušić is Professor of Anatomy and Chair of the Department of Research in Biomedicine and Health at the University of Split School of Medicine, Croatia. She is an Honorary Professor at the University of Edinburgh in the UK. Ana is the Co-Editor in Chief of the *Journal of Global Health.*

Simon Linacre is Director of International Marketing & Development at Cabells having previously spent 15 years at Emerald Publishing, working in journal acquisitions, open access and business development. Simon is an ALPSP (Association of Learned & Professional Society Publishers) tutor, currently leading courses on introduction to journal publishing.
INTRODUCTION TO COPE
Introduction to COPE

Agenda

• COPE: Who we are (Hint: you)

• 10 Core Practices (but only 2 here 😊)
  • Bucket-loads of Resources
COPE CORE PRACTICES

Policies and core practices required to reach the highest standards in publication ethics:

- Allegations of misconduct
- Authorship and contributorship
- Complaints and appeals
- Conflicts of interest/Competing interests
- Data and reproducibility
- Ethical oversight
- Intellectual property
- Journal management
- Peer review processes
- Post-publication discussions and corrections
COPE CORE PRACTICE

Allegations of misconduct

https://cope.onl/misconduct
COPE RESOURCES
Examples of resources for allegations of misconduct

Flowchart
- Reviewer suspected to have appropriated an author’s ideas or data

Guidelines
- Sharing of information among editors-in-chief regarding possible misconduct

Case discussion
- Sharing by a reviewer on social media

Webinar
- Webinar 2019: Allegations of misconduct

Forum

publicationethics.org
COPE RESOURCES

Allegations of misconduct

- Guidelines – Sharing of information among editors-in-chief regarding possible misconduct
COPE CORE PRACTICE

Authorship and contributorship

https://cope.onl/authors
COPE RESOURCES
Examples of resources for authorship and contributorship

Flowcharts
• How to recognise potential authorship problems

Guidelines
• How to handle authorship disputes: a guide for new researchers

Case discussion
• Inconclusive institutional investigation into authorship dispute

Seminar
• WCRI 2019: Responsible authorship

Forum
COPE RESOURCES

Authorship and contributorship

• Changes in authorship flowcharts
• How to recognise potential authorship problems infographic
COPE RESOURCES

Translated resources

• COPE is working towards translating more resources to allow communication with a wider audience.

• Currently, at least some resources in: Arabic, Chinese, French, Italian, Japanese, Persian, Polish, Spanish, Turkish
INTERACTIVE CASES
INTERACTIVE CASE 1
INTERACTIVE CASE 1

Based on Case 06-15

You, as editor, discover that a submitted manuscript on health care doesn’t seem to have formal ethics approval. When you ask the authors to explain, they reply:

- The paper presents anonymised aggregated data on maternal mortality and quality of care in facilities in different regions of the country
- They received permission from local authorities (including local elders, community leaders, and health care providers) to scrutinise records of facilities
- This counts as an audit, so they didn’t seek permission from the university ethics committee
INTERACTIVE CASE 1

Based on Case 06-15

What do you do?

A. Reject the article
B. Inform their institution
C. Review the article as is
D. Other (please type in the Chat box)
SUSPECTED ETHICAL PROBLEM IN A SUBMITTED MANUSCRIPT

REVIEWER (OR EDITOR) RAISES ETHICAL CONCERN ABOUT MANUSCRIPT

Thank reviewer (or editor) and say you plan to investigate

Request author to supply relevant details

Satisfactory response

APOLOGISE TO AUTHOR, INFORM REVIEWER OF OUTCOME AND PROCEED WITH REVIEW

For COPE members, consider submitting case to COPE Forum if it raises novel ethical issues

No or unsatisfactory response

Inform author that review process is suspended until case is resolved

For example, lack of ethical approval, concern about patient consent or protection, or concern about animal experimentation

For example, request evidence of ethical committee/IRB approval or copy of informed consent documents

Regulations regarding what type of study requires ethical approval vary worldwide. In some countries all studies require ethical approval but in others not. This may lead to submission to journals of manuscripts relating to such studies that do not satisfy the journal's normal requirement for independent ethical approval, and rejection of the manuscript because of misunderstanding of local regulations.

In the UK, for example, the Health Research Authority (HRA), which coordinates and regulates ethical approval of research involving human subjects, specifically excludes projects from requiring ethical approval if they fall into the categories of clinical audit, service evaluation, research and usual practice/surveillance work in public health, even though: (i) they may have considerable ethical implications (e.g. the danger of coercion and threats to autonomy and confidentiality); (ii) their methods may overlap with studies defined as ‘research’; and (iii) it may be difficult to decide how to define certain studies, even using the criteria suggested by HRA.

Other countries may have similar restrictions that make it difficult or unnecessary to obtain approval for certain types of study. This guidance has therefore been produced by COPE as an aid to journal editorial teams who are required to review such manuscripts.
COPE recommends that editors reviewing such a manuscript should consider the following, in addition to the usual criteria that are applied during editorial review:

1. Is the study scientifically valid and clearly presented; for example is the sample size adequate, are the results adequately and clearly presented and explained, and have the investigators excluded or considered the possible confounding factors and/or biases? Second, does the study contribute sufficiently to knowledge to make acceptance and publication a possibility?

2. Have the ethical harms been minimised; for example has due care been taken to avoid coercion or exploitation, to protect confidentiality, to minimise the risk of physical and psychological harm and to respect autonomy where possible? (For example, information sheets and consent forms can still be used for certain audits and service evaluations as a demonstration that appropriate ethical standards are being met, even if a research ethics committee has not asked for it). It may be necessary to seek further information from the investigators to establish how they have addressed these issues.

3. Do the benefits outweigh the harms in this particular study’s case?

4. If there is doubt about local law or regulations, editors should clarify this with the authors and ask them to provide a letter from the individual research ethics committee or the research ethics authority in that country about the research.

COPE acknowledges that aspects of this process may already be followed by editorial teams as part of their review of papers, and are also similar to those undertaken by research ethics committees themselves when considering applications. It is suggested, however, that following the above scheme may provide a practical framework. Further, it is advised that such deliberations be documented as part of the journal’s standard record-keeping. Finally, it is hoped that this guidance will be useful for authors as well as editor.
INTERACTIVE CASE 2
INTERACTIVE CASE 2

Based on Case 05-08

You, as editor, find that a review published in your journal:

• Is mainly a translated version of an article published by others in another journal
• Did not declare it was a translation of a published article
• Has some of your editorial board members as authors
INTERACTIVE CASE 2

Based on Case 05-08

What do you do?

A. Retract the article
B. Dismiss the editorial board members
C. Write to the authors and institutions
D. Other (please type in the Chat box)
Note
The instructions to authors should include a definition of plagiarism and state the journal’s policy on plagiarism.

Reader informs editor about suspected plagiarism

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

Check degree of copying

Clear plagiarism
(unattributed use of large portions of text and/or data, presented as if they were by the plagiarist)

- Contact corresponding author in writing, ideally enclosing signed authorship statement (or cover letter) stating that work is original/the author’s own and documentary evidence of plagiarism

Minor copying of short phrases only
(eg. in discussion of research paper). No misattribution of data

- Contact author in neutral terms expressing disappointment/explaining journal’s position. Discuss publishing correction giving reference to original paper(s) if this has been omitted

Inform reader (and plagiarised author(s) if different) of journal’s actions
INTERACTIVE CASE 3
INTERACTIVE CASE 3, PART 1

Based on Case 12-16

One of your handling editors sends a submitted manuscript to 5 peer reviewers:

• 3 agree to review
• All reviews are very positive and recommend the revised manuscript to be accepted

You, as editor, think the reviews are suspicious and investigate:

• You can’t find any past publications for the 3 reviewers
• Their email addresses are from web-based email providers, not institution-based
• You discover all 3 reviewers do not exist
INTERACTIVE CASE 3, PART 1
Based on Case 12-16

What do you do?
A. Reject the manuscript
B. Ask the handling editor to explain
C. Ask the authors to explain
D. Other (please type in the Chat box)
Note
See also infographic 'How to recognise potential manipulation of the peer review process' https://doi.org/10.24318/cope.2019.2.15 and guidance on 'Systematic manipulation of the publication process' https://doi.org/10.24318/cope.2019.2.23.
Can named reviewer independently provide details of the manuscript they are reviewing?

- **SATISFACTORY EXPLANATION, THANK REVIEWER**
  - Contact individual who suggested the named peer reviewer (e.g., handling editor) and ask for explanation
    - If satisfactory (e.g., naive or genuine mistake):
      - THANK INDIVIDUAL AND CONSIDER WHETHER AN ADDITIONAL PEER REVIEWER COULD BE SOUGHT
    - If unsatisfactory/no response or author seemingly suggested the peer reviewer:
      - Explain situation to author and author institution in neutral terms and see if any further information can be shared
        - If satisfactory (e.g., naive or genuine mistake):
          - THANK AUTHOR AND INSTITUTION, CONSIDER CONTINUING WITH PEER REVIEW BUT INVITE ADDITIONAL REVIEWERS
        - If unsatisfactory:
          - REJECT MANUSCRIPT

Thank the contacted individual and say you plan to investigate
INTERACTIVE CASE 3, PART 2

Based on Case 12-16

You ask the handling editor to explain:

• 2/5 reviewers were nominated by the handling editor but did not reply
• The 3 reviewers who reviewed the paper were suggested by the authors at submission stage

You ask all authors to explain, but none reply:

• You also can’t find the institutional research ethics committee
• You discover the vice principal is the paper’s senior author
INTERACTIVE CASE 3, PART 2

Based on Case 12-16

What do you do?

A. Dismiss the handling editor
B. Keep trying to contact the authors/institution
C. Search for submitted/published papers with same authorsreviewers
D. Other (please type in the Chat box)
HOW TO RECOGNISE POTENTIAL MANIPULATION OF THE PEER REVIEW PROCESS

Recognised Features or Patterns of Reviewer Activity

- Similarity to other peer reviewer reports (purportedly from different individuals)
- Positive review in strong contrast to other reviewers (with mainly grammatical changes)
- Complimentary review but pointed out minor technical issues (appearing credible)
- Reviews frequently returned well ahead of the deadline
- Non-institutional email address (including, but not limited to: gmail, yahoo, or hotmail accounts)
- Suspicious email address (atypical for that reviewer)
- Fictitious name
- Work in an unrelated subject to the manuscript
- Atypical features of the IP address
- Extremely quick to agree to peer review
- Agreeing to review many manuscripts (and particularly “active” in a journal’s peer review database
- Third party agency involvement
- A review that is vague in style (language not typical of apparent seniority, experience, or educational background of reviewer)

Recognise ominous signs of peer review manipulation

Best Practice to Minimise Peer Review Manipulation

1. Require that authors submit manuscripts to the journal themselves.
2. Try to use institutional emails or institutional verified ORCIDs when inviting peer reviewers.
3. Always check that suggested peer reviewers are qualified to review the manuscript and their email address is accurate.
4. Check for unusual patterns of behavior which in combination may suggest peer review manipulation is occurring.

Peers reviewers may be suggested by:

- the Editor handling the manuscript.
- authors on submission of their manuscript to a journal.
- another reviewer who is unable to peer review the manuscript.

While there is an expectation that everyone involved in the process acts with integrity and honesty, the peer review process can be susceptible to manipulation as discussed at COPE’s 2016 North American Seminar. The features or patterns of activity shown opposite are suggested to help Editors recognize potential signs of peer review manipulation. Often it is the occurrence of these features in combination that may indicate a potential issue, and they may only become apparent at later stages in the peer review or publishing process.

Relevant COPE Cases:

Case 11-27: Author Creates Bogus Email Accounts for Proposed Reviewers
http://bit.ly/2jxTNmW

Case 12-12: Compromised Peer Review in Published Papers

Case 12-16: Compromised Peer Review (Unpublished)

References:


Other relevant links and resources:

INTERACTIVE CASE 4
INTERACTIVE CASE 4, PART 1

Based on Case 01-33

You, as editor, receive an email saying that:

- A published article in your journal has nearly the same title and content as an article previously published in another journal
- The author lists of the two articles are different
INTERACTIVE CASE 4, PART 1

Based on Case 01-33

What do you do?
A. Retract the article
B. Inform the other journal about duplicate publication
C. Report the authors to their institution for plagiarism
D. Other (please type in the Chat box)
Responding to Whistleblowers when Concerns are Raised Directly

Notes
- The tone of the allegations may be aggressive or personal. Respond politely, don't get drawn into personal exchanges.
- Sometimes the whistleblower may prefer to remain anonymous. It is important not to try to 'out' people who wish to be anonymous.

A published article is criticised via direct email to the Editor or Publisher. This could include anonymous or not anonymous concerns about soundness of the data or allegations of plagiarism, figure manipulation, or other forms of misconduct.

Let the publisher and the communications team know about any allegations. It is useful to establish an escalation procedure and agree a process for responding ahead of time.

Do the allegations contain specific and detailed evidence to support the claim?

Yes

No
Redundant (Duplicate) Publication in a Published Article

Notes:
- The instructions to authors should state the journal's policy on redundant publication.
- To help in future investigations, ask authors at submission stage to verify that their manuscript is original and has not been published elsewhere.
- ICMJE advises that translations are acceptable but MUST reference the original. Editors may consider publishing a correction (i.e., the link to the original article) rather than a retraction/notice of duplicate publication in such cases.

Reader informs editor about redundant publication

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

Check extent and nature of overlap/redundancy

- Major overlap/redundancy (i.e., based on same dataset with identical findings and/or evidence that authors have sought to hide redundancy, for example, by changing title or author order or not referring to previous papers)
  - Contact author in neutral terms expressing concern/explaining journal's policy

- Minor overlap ('salami publishing' with some element of redundancy) or legitimate repetition or re-analysis (e.g., subgroup analysis/extended follow-up/repeated methods)
  - Inform reader of decision

- No significant overlap
INTERACTIVE CASE 4, PART 2

Based on Case 01-33

You then receive a request from the corresponding author to withdraw the article on the grounds that “the same work has been published by my senior colleague in some other journal”
INTERACTIVE CASE 4, PART 2

Based on Case 01-33

What do you do?
A. Retract the article
B. Retract and remove the article
C. Ask the other journal to publish a statement of redundant publication
D. Other (please type in the Chat box)
Cooperation between research institutions and journals on research integrity cases: guidance from the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE)

Summary

Institutions and journals both have important duties relating to research and publication misconduct. Institutions are responsible for the conduct of their researchers and for encouraging a healthy research environment. Journals are responsible for the conduct of their editors, for safeguarding the research record, and for ensuring the reliability of everything they publish. It is therefore important for institutions and journals to communicate and collaborate effectively on cases relating to research integrity. To achieve this, we make the following recommendations.

Institutions should:

- have a research integrity officer (or office) and publish their contact details prominently;
GUIDELINES:
SHARING OF INFORMATION AMONG EDITORS-IN-CHIEF REGARDING POSSIBLE MISCONDUCT
GUIDELINES:
RETRACTION GUIDELINES
FOR MORE INFORMATION

https://publicationethics.org/
THANK YOU
Dr Trevor Lane,
COPE Council; Chair, Education Subcommittee
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