

EDITORIAL

RESEARCH AND SCIENTIFIC PUBLICATIONS : SOME ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

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Research approaches and methods are multi fold. Whether it is qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods, research attempts to generate new knowledge. In sciences, it attempts to provide answers to unanswered research questions based on an accepted approach. It is imperative that such findings of answers to those questions are disseminated to relevant audiences for education, generate applications of the discovery or to scrutinise scientific validity of both the approach or the answer. Therefore, in sciences conducting research and their publications in scientific literature are significant.

This communication identifies key ethical considerations in scientific publications. The intention of highlighting these nuances is to appreciate their relevance to maintain quality of publications while maintaining ethical standards and professionalism. Many appear to recall that there are such ethical considerations yet find it difficult at times to articulate and posture them in context.

Most research is collaborative work. The outcome of such research is the collaborative efforts. At many instances, there have been disputes in naming authors and their sequence of appearance in the paper. It is important that the research team leader or the principle investigator of the research, identify this issue a-priory and determine potential collaborators, discuss with them their contribution and agree with what each contributor's role is and their position in any publication that may arise out of the research.

Appearing one's name in a paper indicates responsibility accountability and award of credit for personal contribution. The authorship and their order of appearance should under all circumstances need to reflect the order of honest weighted contributions by each author. Having an authorship in a paper has numerous benefits to the author and his/her affiliation.

Some institutions and journals have given directions as to how authorship is given and its order of importance. However these guidelines seem to vary and changing. In contrast, some junior researchers may add senior researchers even in the absence of any input with the hope of the paper being published or to secure junior's tenure, grants or other perks. Alternatively, the senior researchers may also indicate directly or indirectly that their names are included in papers published even in the absence or minimal contribution to the work reported, to falsely illustrate their research potentiality and participation which otherwise may not be reflected due to their engagement in administrative or policy level tasks. Further, junior researchers are inclined to satisfy the senior staff by including names of seniors, as the senior colleagues in a department can make things 'difficult' for the research or the person. These hidden intricacies require careful examination and address.

The order of authorship, how it should appear in a paper, vary depending on the discipline or setting. Generally, the descending order of contribution, placing the person who took the lead in writing the manuscript or doing the research first and the most experienced

contributor last is commonly used. However, placing researchers in alphabetical order or random order has also been seen. In any case it is important that;

1. all authors whose name are in, read and review the manuscript and accept order of authorship and sign for approval of the work to be published.
2. all contributors listed have made a substantial contribution to the work presented
3. all significant contributors to the work presented are listed as authors
4. that there are no honorary or 'guest authors'

The next point that requires consideration is whether or not the paper submitted for publication is original and has not been published elsewhere. Then the authors take responsibility of the contents of the paper. The authors generally need to declare that it is not presently under consideration for publication by any other journal. The corresponding author must declare if the work presented in the manuscript have been presented as an oral presentation or as a poster presentation.

Most journals request for an ethical clearance certificate. This implies that the journals or publishers are concerned that the work carried out is conducted giving emphasis to

ethical standards and ethical considerations. Further, the authors should refrain from any form of plagiarism or coping that can be now detected easily through certain software that have been developed. In any case it is the responsibility of the authors that they present original work with no plagiarism. Previous work that is used to argue or explain in the manuscript should have been duly referenced /cited and permissions obtained where relevant.

When a manuscript is submitted to a journal it is assumed that the work has been conducted under strict scientific validity. The peer reviewing process attempts to audit scientific methods and validity, however, it is the responsibility of the researcher to maintain quality and standards of science at all times.

It is important that the authors notify the editors of the journal in which it is published ,any pre or post legal or administrative consequence that result on the research presented, so that the editorial board can decide on the fate of the paper in concurrence with the author/s.

Above are a few key ethical considerations I have highlighted. It is not only the scientific method that matters in research, but authorship, how the research is conducted and how it is presented to an audience too matters.