

**A Study on Publication Ethics: Special reference to Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE)**

**Joswin Prince Rodrigues<sup>1,2</sup>**

1. Department of Commerce, CHRIST(Deemed to university,  
Hosur Main Road, Bhavani Nagar, S.G. Palya, Bengaluru, Karnataka 560029

2. Department of Commerce, St. Josephs Evening College,  
Museum Road, Bangalore-560035

Communication Details

Email: [Joswin199@gmail.Com](mailto:Joswin199@gmail.Com)

[Joswin.rodrigues@res.christuniversity.in](mailto:Joswin.rodrigues@res.christuniversity.in)

Mobile : 9448855275

Institution Address:

Department of Commerce, CHRIST(Deemed to university,  
Hosur Main Road, Bhavani Nagar, S.G. Palya, Bengaluru, Karnataka 560029

Residential Address

SJIM Hostel, ThyagiPanivelu Road, Victoria Layout, Bangalore, 560047

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## ***Abstract***

*Today, research is everything. The things we see around are the result of someone's study — the researcher studies to gain and share knowledge. And to help the society with their finding or invention apart getting a promotion. In this way of learning and sharing, sometimes the researcher does follow wrong directions of publishing and gaining the limelight. Hence this article is an effort of the researcher to highlight these issues. As part of the research, the researcher has covered some part Committee of Publication Ethics (COPE) and the flowcharts of COPE. Also, the researcher has highlighted some other agencies like EASE, United States Office of Research Integrity and International Committee of Medical Journal (ICMJ). This research is an attempt to bring awareness among the researcher about the ethical issues involved and talks about what are the agencies involved in the solving of a moral problem. This research is secondary. Citation is used to cite the resources collected from the secondary sources.*

*Keywords: COPE, ICMJ, and EASE*

## **1. Introduction**

A publication of an article in a peer-reviewed or a conference journal is an essential part of the research. Present-day universities have made it mandatory to publish to award PhD degrees. A research article will help a researcher to build his knowledge coherently. An excellent essay is the direct reflection of the author's experience about the subject experience. An Author to write an article will read tens of thousands of reading material. At the same time, the credibility of the author and the article written by the author depends on the integrity of the researcher. Indian researchers are at fifth rank in the scientific research field. At the same time, Indian researcher is highest in numbers in retraction and plagiarism related issues. All the famous publishing houses follow the ethical principles of their own, or they support the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

According to Wager Eligabeth(2015), in her article *Publication ethics:Whose Problem is it?* She addresses the role of different players in the paper. In the beginning, she speaks about the part of the editor and publisher. She makes it clear that the editor has no role to play but to inform the publisher about any issues in the article. The reason behind is of lack of experience of the editor to deal with these issues. She in her study cites an example of a publishing house becoming bankrupt because of editors actions. In the same study, she also speaks about Institutions being lenient in their investigation. As mentioned above a journal or an editor has no right to investigate the matter of research misconduct. However, they can refer to this matter to institute affiliated. She cites a statistic and quotes that the response of the institutions in research misconduct and investigation was not satisfactory. The main reason behind is the institutions do not want their name to be spoiled in the society. At the same time institution to achieve better ranks, make their researchers print papers which present a fake reality. The study refersto the vast number of publication because of the pressure to publish as salami publication. At the same time, she blames the environment of the university or the institute, which makes the researcherdo these things. She says pressure to publish may not result in misconduct; instead, it will contribute towards the fault. She, in her article, not only blaming or questioning the authors but also examines the integrity of an editor. She there is an instance where an editor is abusing his position being an editor and asking the publisher to publish without any peer review. There are instances where an editor asks his family members to write for a particular journal. She quotes a case where a news article and journal publishes a positive review ofa medical product. For which the publisher had received \$19Million in royalties from the manufacturer. She adds saying that a journal's policy also will affect the author's intention to plagiarise. A journal with strong publishing ethics may not end up getting stolen papers. She also speaks about the role of software in identifying the plagiarism. She speaks of software like Turnitin or Crosscheck has helped the researcher to check the level of piracy in the study, still at the same time, this software can mislead the publishing houses by manipulating the images. In this case, a publishing house must be ready with all the necessary steps to avoid this. They should have tools to verify the above thing and provide it to the editors. She, in her paper, has been inclusive of all the role player in the research work(Wager, 2015).

## **1.1.The Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE)**

According to Wager Eligabeth,(2012) Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) started as a self-help group to discuss the troubling ethical issues. COPE is a nonprofit organisation which began with an objective of define best practices in ethics of scholarly publishing and to assist editors, publishers and researchers. COPE was founded in 1997 by a small number of UK Medical editors. Presently COPE has more than 12000 members all over the globe. COPEs first publication standard came in the year 1999 and subsequently got it published as Good Publication Practice in the Annual Report in 1999. The first edition of code was published on the website in the year 2004, and they have been revised and published again in 2017 COPE expects its members to follow its guidelines strictly. COPEs takes the member complaints seriously and does not investigate the individual complaints but will give advice. COPE will have meeting three months once in London. However, most of the issues brought by outside editors. COPEs advice is freely available to the public on their website(Wager, 2012).

### **1.1.1. COPE Flow charts**

COPE in its publicly accessible website has given many flowcharts which would provide clear, practical advice to the editor in a step by step format. These flowcharts are available freely on their website(COPE, no date). This research article will also mostly talk about COPE flow charts in instances of misconduct in research

### **1.1.2. COPE on retraction**

Discussions of the cases at COPE indicate reluctance from the Publisher and Editor side to retract the article or the work of an author. Publisher and Editor believe that editor alone has the right to withdraw the article as indicated by Elizebeth Wager(2011) in her study. Editors and Publishers are concerned about the actual threats of litigation from the author(Wager and Williams, 2011). However, COPE has made a manual to make sure the procedure of retraction. COPE guideline makes it clear on informing the author about the cancellation of the article or the content from the article(Wager *et al.*, 2009).

## **1.2. Other Agencies in Publication Ethics (EASE, United States Office of Research Integrity and International Committee of Medical Journal)**

At the same time, there are other agencies existing which are working towards the ethics in publication. EASE guidelines are a result of lengthy discussions held in the year 2009 in PISA. EASE guidelines for authors and translators of scientific articles are one kind of instructions given to the authors explaining how to write complete, concise and clear manuscripts. EASE guidelines require the author to write understandably, structure to be followed and keeping the abstract highly informative. The latest publication ethics guidelines were presented in the year 2013 (Wikipedia, 2019a).

The second most important is the United States Office of Research Integrity is US agency which looks into the integrity of research in US unrespect of health researches. It was created in the year 1992. The Office of Research Integrity oversees and directs Public Health Service (PHS) research integrity activities on behalf of the Secretary of Health and Human Services with the exception of the regulatory research integrity activities of the Food and Drug Administration (Wikipedia, 2019b).

The third in this list is International Committee of Medical Journal (ICMJ) a group of medical journal editors. Participant of these meet annually and decide on the funding on the recommendation for Conduct, Reporting, Editing and Publication of scholarly work in medical journals. The current members of the ICMJE are Annals of Internal Medicine, British Medical Journal, Bulletin of the World Health Organization, Deutsches Ärzteblatt (German Medical Journal), Ethiopian Journal of Health Sciences, Iranian Journal of Medical Sciences, JAMA (Journal of the American Medical Association), Journal of Korean Medical Science, New England Journal of Medicine, New Zealand Medical Journal, The Lancet, Revista Médica de Chile (Medical Journal of Chile), Ugeskrift for Laeger (Danish Medical Journal), the U.S. National Library of Medicine, and the World Association of Medical Editors (ICMJE / About ICMJE, no date)

## **2. Different Misconducts by the author and how COPE deals with it?**

This section explains the different misconducts from the author's side:

## **2.1.Plagiarism**

Plagiarism is one kind of activity where a person copies from other persons works. Plagiarism is common in academic journals. This negligence has caused many researchers to lose their job in the universities. Plagiarism is of three types according to the COPE flowchart on plagiarism; they are 1. Clear Plagiarism: here, a large amount of data has been copied and presented as if it belongs to the plagiarist. Plagiarism is a severe case of plagiarism or copying of someone's works. In this case, COPE is flow chart is suggesting informing all the corresponding author, editors and rejection of work done by the author. 2. Minor Copying: Here, the author has copied content from others works in small terms or the author has tried to copy the non-native speaker in his work. COPE is not harsh on the author in this situation; instead, it is asking to express disappointment explaining journals position or may ask the author to change the content or paraphrase it (Chart, 2008). 3. Redundancy: where the plagiarist has copied the work of the author. Redundancy or duplication entire work is a separate flow chart in COPE. Here the excess is divided into two types. They are i) Major overlap and ii) Minor Overlap (Salami Publishing). In the first Major overlap case, the case is severe, and COPE will go to an extent to retract the work of the plagiarist and also will inform the institute affiliated (COPE, 2008).

The author must remember that plagiarism is dealt with severe punishment. A person or researcher may lose his position. Also, in case of redundancy or taking the work from the native origin, it is good to give credits to the original author or advisable to cite a person's work in a research article by the author.

## **2.3.Fabricated data**

In the study, an author is expected to collect data and do the research. But in many cases, the author may take the previously available data, change it and present it. Using previously available data leads to data fabrication offence from the authored. This fraud is easy to find out for an experienced reviewer. The Reviewer may ask for a fresh datasheet for further review (Sengupta S, 1985).

The COPE flow chart is giving a clear picture as in what would be the solution. In this case, the reviewer will go to the extent of asking raw data and explanation from the author, and if the reviewer finds the answer satisfactory, then he/ she may make apologies to the author. Otherwise, he may contact the institution affiliated of the author to do a further investigation and after the study, if the author is found guilty, then the journal has the all the right to reject researchers work (Chart, no date).

## **2.4. Simultaneous submission**

In many of the research institute as part of partial fulfilment of the Doctoral degree, it is compulsory to publish in an international journal. A foreign sometimes will take months and years together to get the work published. At this juncture, research in greed to finish the job soon may go simultaneous submission. The Author must remember At the time of manuscript submission, most journals obtain a declaration from the authors that the manuscript is original and is not being considered for publication by any other scientific journals. The cope guideline suggest in case of simultaneous submission, and publishing house should look for the precedence should be determined by the date on which a licensee to publishing or a copyright transfer agreement was signed by the authors (Wager *et al.*, 2009)

## **2.5. Citation Manipulation (Self Citation)**

Here in this section of the research talks about a publishing house or a journal forcing (Coercion) the author to cite the articles from his own or their diaries. When practised by editors and publishing houses, it deteriorates the quality of the research and sends a message to the young researcher about the acceptance of unethical behaviour. Citations are helping the journals to recognise itself well in the research atmosphere, but self-citation will lead to unethical behaviour from the editor and publisher side (Irwin and Barbour, 2012). However, there are instances where authors who publish a lot in their niche area and the advancement of the previous study they quote the same literature which is published by them. In this case, it is not unethical to self-cite previously done work (Sengupta S, 1985).

## **2.6. Authorship Disputes**

One main task or objective of the COPE committee is to reduce the authorship dispute. COPE address two main issues in authorship issue i.e. 1. Ghost and 2. Gift author. Here the Ghost is understood in two ways, i.e. first-person being a professional writer and second person is a researcher who contributed a significant amount of content to the research. In both these cases, their role is not recognized. Whereas in the case of Gift author, an author is given authorship right without having any contribution from him/her. COPE being a guideline entity is being silent about these, but it supports the statements of ICMJE. It says “All persons designated as authors should qualify for authorship, and all those who qualify should be listed.” The ICMJE describes three essential criteria that must be collectively met to be credited with authorship:

- a. Substantial contribution to the conduct of study including its conception and design, data acquisition, statistical analysis, and interpretation, AND
- b. Drafting or revising it critically the article for intellectual content, AND
- c. Final approval of the final version to be published, AND
- d. Agreement to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.

Apart from these above conditions of ICMJE, an author should be in a situation to identify which Co-author has contributed how much and what part of the research his contribution is taken place. Those who do not meet the criteria listed above, should register their names in the acknowledgement section of the research. Further ICMJE makes it clear about the above condition saying these above conditions are not intended to be used as disqualifying criteria for colleagues from authorship who otherwise meet the first condition. The intention of these criteria is to make all the authors participate in all the four steps of research and claim the credit (*ICMJE / Recommendations / Defining the Role of Authors and Contributors*, no date).

COPE, on the other hand, giving some instruction about authorship issues. It's saying Authorship can be used as a bargaining tool if the member does not agree on the presentation and



interpretation of results. It means all the author should see the document and should give the consent. I suppose someone's name is included without the permission; then they bring this to the notice of other authors. If the same is found out after the publication, the author should talk to the journal and convince them to remove the name. In the case of omission of the name of the author, he/ she must speak to the team and publisher about this issue. However, it is unlikely that the publisher will add left out the name, without the consent of the other authors. Further COPE is suggesting three principles to resolve the authorship dispute. They are 1. encouraging the culture of ethical authorship. 2. Start discussing invention while planning for the research. And the last one is deciding the authorship before starting the article(Albert and Wager, 2003).

## **2.7.Any other ethical issues**

There are many cases which are included in the COPE manual which may not have included here. In this section researcher would be covering some other matters like withdrawal paper at the proof stage, reviewer request to add multiple citations of his own, authorship issues misleading action of another author etc. These are some handful of issues which the researcher has cited in the article. Research is evolving and flourishing area. In this area, there are crimes committed knowingly or intentionally by the parties.

## **6. Conclusion**

The researcher must ensure that the research is conducted in an ethical manner. Ethics is the general talk of the town and practice to be followed by a human. This ethics, when to apply it to the research it becomes research ethics. We are learning these ethical or unethical practices from our guides or supervisors, fellow scholars, editors, publishers, friends or in simple everyone in this circle of research will teach us what is ethical and unethical. Being researcher, he/she has the responsibility to honour the trust a colleague keeps on him/her or sometimes irresponsibility towards conducting research may make someone's life miserable or through research a researcher serving the public. We being a researcher, we research with the expectation of gaining and sharing the knowledge. In this course of learning and sharing, if we adhere to unethical practices,, then there is no one to trust our works. Its high time to all of us to

know the ethical issues in the research and researchers has done fair attempt highlight some of the agencies in his research work.

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