

PLAGIARISM: A NEW CHALLENGE FOR SCIENTIFIC PUBLICATION

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In academia, the publication of scientific research is an integral process. Research article acts as a platform for the dissemination of knowledge on various research carried out in the scientific world. Further, it creates a pathway to many researchers to carry out research work. Of the many reasons of publication of a research work, some of them are particularly based on the promotion of the researcher and other academic benefits. Post-publication, a scholarly paper acts as a benchmark that is used by several fellow scientists for various purposes such as citing for reference, to gain an in-depth knowledge about the particular subject matter as well as review for academic purposes.¹

Etymologically, the term "plagiarism," which means literary piracy, originates from the Latin words *plagiarius* ("kidnapper") and *plaga* ("hunting net"); so in literature, the plagiarism in its simplest meaning means stealing of thoughts, ideas or literary contents.² According to Cambridge Learner's dictionary, plagiarism is "copying someone else's work or ideas." It is exactly difficult to trace the origin of plagiarism however it is thought that ever since the discipline of communication in science was established, the concept of plagiarism has evolved since then. According to World Association of Medical Editors (WAME) "plagiarism is when six consecutive words are copied, 7 to 11 words are overlapping set of 30 letters."^{3,4}

Different authors and articles have classified plagiarism in different ways according to their perspectives, but most commonly, the plagiarism is classified in the four different types, they are:

Direct plagiarism: When a text is being copied word-to-word without a partial or complete acknowledgment of the primary source, this form of plagiarism is called a direct plagiarism.

Mosaic form: It is basically the theft of ideas and opinions or a few words and phrases without the appropriate citation of the primary source.

Self-plagiarism: When somebody re-uses his/her own work without the use of quotation marks and permission to reproduce text, it is the case of self-plagiarism.

Accidental plagiarism: If an author ignores and refuses to cite a source or unknowingly paraphrases the source with similar words, then the instance of accidental plagiarism

takes place. It may be the mistake on the author's side or an unknown act, accidental plagiarism is subjected to the same range of plagiarism infringement as other types of plagiarism.⁵

In the research field, plagiarism is considered as a serious offence. It not only jeopardizes the reputation of the journal but is also unfair to its readers who read it as an original article, when in fact it is not. In many cases, we found that the authors seem to be particularly focused about facts and figures of the articles but when it comes to plagiarism, they simply seem to overlook it.

Birat Journal of Health Sciences (BJHS) was established in 2016, which is a tri-annual, indexed, peer-reviewed, open access, health journal published by Birat Medical College and Teaching Hospital, Biratnagar, Nepal. In the past one year of BJHS experience, we have found different cases of plagiarism. There were authors who were unaware of plagiarism, there were some who were aware but gave a less priority to plagiarism and there were some who intentionally plagiarized.

The credibility of any scientific paper is the bottom-line for any researcher who desires to contribute with their share of study on any evidence based medicine (EBM).⁶ The work should be backed up by enough facts, data, quantitative and qualitative research design and reporting. The ethical codes of Good Scientific Practice (GSP) has to be pursued by every author that is based in the principle of honesty and integrity.⁴ As the scientific works are becoming multidisciplinary day-by-day, the honesty and truthfulness of the authors are the two pillars for any research publication. Apart from the promotional and academic benefits, the authors receive various remunerations for their scholarly work and this has to make them even more responsible for any publication they make and be credible for the reliability of the work they present.^{1,7}

BJHS is much concerned on plagiarism and stand firm in case of plagiarism. As we all know, there can never be "zero" plagiarism in any article as the authors take references from various sources and cite them so there will be some similarities in the research article with their sources. At BJHS, we always try to persevere to minimize the level of plagiarism as much as we could.

There could be numerous motivations for an author to commit the plagiarism. For a beginner, it may be the



enthusiasm to publish their first research works so in a hurry using the short-cut way, they plagiarize. For some, it is mostly related to the promotions, as published articles are mandatory for promotional activities in almost all academic sectors in medical colleges. This in-turn puts an enormous amount of pressure on the author and creates an obligation to anyhow publish the specified number of articles within a specific time frame. Other reasons behind the plagiarism may be lack of research exposure, busy in clinical responsibilities, poor research culture, lack of awareness towards plagiarism, and negligence for plagiarism.

As discussed above, the honesty and reliability of the results are the “flesh and bones” of any scientific research article, the researcher should follow the highest level of ethical standard to avoid any misconduct. These scientific misconducts could either be unintentional and intentional. While the inappropriate research methodology is the cause of former, the latter is the result of obvious deceitfulness of the author and a clear violation of ethical standards (intellectual dishonesty).¹

It is a bitter fact that in most of the developing countries like Nepal, the concept of plagiarism is not prioritized. It is very important for the authors of the developing countries to be more focused on the various aspects of plagiarism.⁷ As there are very limited opportunities for the researchers of the developing countries to attend the conferences and seminars that particularly focuses on plagiarism, the authors should keep themselves updated when it comes to plagiarism and its various aspects to minimize them.¹ There are various simple measures to reduce the plagiarism. Some of them are; properly citing the references that contains a full bibliographic information, paraphrasing the sentences that are taken from the various sources rather than “copying and pasting” the whole contents, mandatory use of quotation marks for more than six consecutive words that are repeated, mandatory permission of authors and publisher for any re-production of graphics and texts.

It is very important to know that when preparing a manuscript, the author has to be more conscious about writing it in their own words, literally and figuratively. There is always a room for improvement for poor language and grammar but it cannot be compromised at the expense of plagiarism.⁸ Nowadays, there are various online softwares (for example, CrossCheck, iThenticate, etc.) available which can detect the plagiarism in any article in various layers. This gives the liberty for any author to check and recheck their articles for plagiarism and reduce the level of plagiarism in their articles. In many cases, the publisher also ask the authors to sign a written statement to avoid any conflict in regard to plagiarism and self-plagiarism but in those cases as well, the mischief of misconduct cannot be avoided (a case of intentional plagiarism).^{6,4}

There is a famous quote from Albert Einstein where he says “Most people say that it is the intellect which makes a great scientist. They are wrong; it is the character.” Thus, creating awareness amongst the authors and scientist about the plagiarism and ethical misconduct is the prerequisite condition and a key to avoid plagiarism. It is important for the authors to understand that their work should be honest and that it does not violate any copyright law.⁹

It is an important fact that scientific journals and institutions that publish them have to be responsible for the publication, monitoring and promotion of research and development activities. To achieve this, it is important to organize the training, workshops and seminars regarding plagiarism. These trainings should be done at all levels, i.e., local/regional/national levels as plagiarism not only ruins the quality of an article but also raises questions on the credibility of the journal.

KEYWORDS

Plagiarism, publication, scientific misconduct

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