

Research and Authorship – a Bond Worth Monitoring

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Research along with journal publications are one of the cornerstones of academics. They provide a channel for researchers within a field, while acting as a road to recognition for researchers among peers. Journal papers also add glory in professional careers, and is considered a criterion for requirements. In fact, more the number, the more competent an individual is considered. However, what is supposed to be the ultimate merit for a researcher is now often getting misused as the publication process becomes murkier. As the pressure to publish in a “Publish or Perish” environment rises,¹ so has the tendency of publication misconducts to occur increased.

One of the more popular misconducts is guest authorship or “gift authorship”. Gift authorship is referred to when influential individuals “lend” their name to a study in order to increase publication chances,² taking acknowledgement for a research paper when, in fact, there has been no contribution whatsoever. This not only distorts the criteria for promotion but also increases the publications of the honorary author, while actually reducing the recognition given to the contributions of researchers who actually satisfy the standards for authorship. Consequently, gift authorship is a major ethical problem and immediate actions must be undertaken to reduce its incidence.

Also, it has been observed that in some cases, authors having no connection demographically or whatsoever, claim to have carried out studies in unison – a point worth pondering!

Secondly, there is the concern of favouritism

while publishing in journals. In a study published in 2021, Scanniff A et al. reported that a subset of bio-medical journals may be exercising considerable bias and favouritism in publication. The authors investigated the time interval of submission and publication, and encountered that prolific individuals stood to benefit quicker peer reviews. In addition, the researchers discovered, what they deemed to be, evidence of favouritism or "nepotism." It was found that for roughly 25 percent of these journals, the prolific individual was the editor-in-chief, and in 61 percent of the cases, the author was part of the editorial staff.³ In light of this discovery, the authors proposed a hypothesis, according to which, the "percentage of publications of the most prolific author" could serve as an indicator of whether or not a journal exhibits patterns of favouritism. If the "percentage of publications of the most prolific author" of a journal is 40 percent, for instance, this indicates that only one author was accountable for 40 percent of the total number of papers published in the journal, which implies that the journal gave special privileges to that researcher. Such scenarios can be extremely detrimental to the research world if deserving articles from unknown or new researchers are passed over for publication in favour of influential names.

Such practices clearly signify the greed of present authors to get undeserving credit by attaching their names to publications by whatever means available.

Though this might seem or appear relatively minor or negligible, the damage done to the

academic and research world is hundredfold, especially when undeservingly credited individuals end up promoted in positions of decision making, creating an even more exponential negative effect.

Where are we headed to?

As the saying goes, one rotten apple spoils the whole bunch.

Hence, in my suggestion, there is a need to monitor, and maybe adopt a practice of proper registration of the research along with authorship of the concerned individuals before conducting the research, rather than at the time of publication.

It is time we open our eyes to this issue, that is plaguing the research world, and address it.

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