COPE and Publication Ethics

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Overview

• What is publication ethics?
• What is COPE?
• What are the big issues?
• What help can you get?
• What are the challenges?
• What are the solutions?
What is publication ethics?

“A set of common rules among authors, editors, reviewers and publishers to protect the integrity of the scientific record.”

Charlotte Haug, previous Vice Chair, COPE
What is COPE?

COPE is a forum for editors and publishers of peer reviewed journals to discuss all aspects of publication ethics. It also advises editors on how to handle cases of research and publication misconduct. Read more about COPE...
Who are COPE members?

General members
- 10,000+ members (editors, publishers, associates)
- International and fully inclusive (100+ countries)
- Broad range of subject areas

Constitutional members
- 40 council members elected by general members or co-opted
- Trustee Board: officers/committee chairs, elected by Council members
- All volunteers, supported by 5 paid staff
COPE provides Leadership, Resources, and Voice.
COPE resources and services

**Code of Conduct**
Through the Code of Conduct, COPE aims to define best practice in the ethics of scholarly publishing and to assist editors, editorial board members, owners of journals and publishers to achieve this.

**Guidelines**
Access COPE's official guidance, including the Retraction Guidelines.

**Flowcharts**
Flowcharts are designed to help editors follow COPE's Code of Conduct and implement its advice when faced with cases of suspected misconduct.

**eLearning**
COPE's eLearning course is designed to give editors a deeper understanding about publication ethics and practical guidance about how to detect, prevent and handle misconduct.

**International standards for editors and authors**
Position statements setting out international standards for responsible research publication for editors and authors.

**Discussion Documents**
Discussion documents aim to stimulate discussion and debate within the academic publishing community. Comments on the documents will be
COPE expectations

- COPE expects members to adhere to code of conduct
- COPE will consider complaints against members
- Facilitate dialogue
- Advise on best practice
- Not specifics
What are the big issues?
Prevalence of problems

Publication Ethics: 16 years of COPE — Irene Hames, Charon A Pierson, Natalie E Ridgeway and Virginia Barbour
7th International Congress on Peer Review and Biomedical Publication
http://www.peerreviewcongress.org/abstracts_2013.html
For Editors – handling unethical practices

RISE OF THE RETRACTIONS
In the past decade, the number of retraction notices has shot up 10-fold (top), even as the literature has expanded by only 44%. It is likely that only about half of all retractions are for researcher misconduct (middle). Higher-impact journals have logged more retraction notices over the past decade, but much of the increase during 2006–10 came from lower-impact journals (bottom).

Nature 478, 26-28 (2011)
Peer review problems

Relatively recently discovered (2011)

Peer review scams and cartels (2014)

Fake email addresses and electronic submissions facilitated this activity

Resulted in mass retractions by publishers (2015)
How are issues detected?

Misconduct/errors can be detected
  – By editor
  – By software
  – By reviewers
  – By authors
  – During peer review
  – AND post-publication (readers)
What help can you get?
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**Flowcharts**
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**Sample Letters**
Sample letters for editors covering a range of scenarios e.g. suspected plagiarism, change of authorship, undisclosed COIs

**Guidelines**
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**eLearning**
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**Audit**
Tool to help editors think about ethical issues and decide what is best for their journals

**International standards for editors and authors**
Position statements setting out international standards for responsible research publication for editors and authors.

**Discussion Documents**
Discussion documents aim to stimulate discussion and debate within the academic publishing community. Comments on the documents will be used to inform future guidelines and policies.

**COPE Digest**
COPE's monthly newsletter, providing up to date news on COPE and publication ethics issues elsewhere.

**Seminars**
Programmes and presentations from previous seminars.
COPE Ethical Guidelines for Peer Reviewers

Irene Hames on behalf of COPE Council
March 2013, v.1

Peer review in all its form plays an important role in ensuring the integrity of the scholarly record. The process depends to a large extent on trust, and requires that everyone involved behaves responsibly and ethically. Peer reviewers play a central and critical part in the peer-review process, but too often come to the role without any guidance and may be unaware of their ethical obligations. The COPE Ethical Guidelines for Peer Reviewers set out the basic principles and standards to which all peer reviewers should adhere during the peer-review process. It is hoped they will provide helpful guidance to researchers, be a reference for journals and editors in guiding their reviewers, and act as an educational resource for institutions in training their students and researchers.

Basic principles to which peer reviewers should adhere

Peer reviewers should:

- only agree to review manuscripts for which they have the subject expertise required to carry out a proper assessment and which they can assess in a timely manner
- respect the confidentiality of peer review and not reveal any details of a manuscript or its review, during or after the peer-review process, beyond those that are released by the journal
- not use information obtained during the peer-review process for their own or any other purpose
COPE Guidelines

RETRACTION GUIDELINES

Summary

Journal editors should consider retracting a publication if:

- they have clear evidence that the findings are unreliable, either as a result of misconduct (e.g. data fabrication) or honest error (e.g. miscalculation or experimental error)
- the findings have previously been published elsewhere without proper crossreferencing, permission or justification (i.e. cases of redundant publication)
- it constitutes plagiarism
- it reports unethical research
COPE discussion documents

Discussion document on Best Practice for Consent for Publishing Medical Case Reports

What constitutes authorship? COPE Discussion Document

Discussion/guidance document on handling competing interests
COPE’s 18 Flowcharts (in 6 languages)

- How to respond to whistle blowers
- What to do if you suspect a reviewer has appropriated an author’s idea or data
- What to do if you suspect plagiarism
- What to do if you suspect redundant (duplicate) publication
- Changes in Authorship
- Conflict of Interest
- What to do if you suspect an ethical problem
- What to do if you suspect fabricated data

Guides for a logical process of investigation and decision making
Example flowchart

How to respond to whistle blowers when concerns are raised via social media

A published article is criticised on social media or a post-publication peer review site(s). This could include anonymous or not anonymous concerns about scientific soundness 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

Treat in the same way as concerns raised directly.

No

Are the comments targeted directly at the author, editor, publisher or the journal?

Note: The tone of the allegations may be aggressive or personal. Respond politely; don’t get drawn into personal exchanges.

Note: Sometimes the whistle blower may prefer to remain anonymous. It is important not to try to “out” people who wish to be anonymous.

Note: It is important to take the discussion seriously.
COPE forum

Submit a case

Case name (optional)

Any year

Search

Search by classification

- Questionable/unethical research (171)
- Redundant/duplicate publication (116)
- Data (108)
- Misconduct/questionable behaviour (107)
- Authorship (103)
- Correction of the literature (89)
- Conflict of interest (64)
- Plagiarism (59)
- Peer review (56)
- Miscellaneous (54)

• Anonymous description of real cases
• Discussion
• Advice, follow up, resolution
• Searchable resource
There are still challenges
Nuffield Council report

“58% of survey respondents are aware of scientists feel tempted or under pressure to compromise on research integrity and standards”

The Culture of Scientific Research in the UK. http://nuffieldbioethics.org/project/research-culture/

- Pressure to publish
- Reliance on metrics
- Perverse incentives
- Compromise on standards
- Verification
There are no easy solutions
Suggestions for actions

Role for:
- Technology
- Training
- Transparency
- Unbiased reporting
- Guidelines e.g. EQUATOR
- Reproducibility
- Data sharing
- ORCID
- Emphasis on correction

The Culture of Scientific Research in the UK. http://nuffieldbioethics.org/project/research-culture/
Publication ethics – a wicked problem?

Accepting the complexity may at least help to understand what it is that needs to be solved. Could we change the incentive structure to reward authors for more than merely being published in a journal?

Ginny Barbour, Chair COPE

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