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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Ethical Risk in Research and Challenge to Academic Integrity

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Abstract: The purpose of the work is to delve into the hypothetical proposition that ethics in research, academic and in allied professional space are often negotiated. This can be considered 'ethical deficit' in the practice, resulting the impression of uncertainty in the minds of research findings receivers. So, paper would argue that practice of ethics has been in 'complex position'. **Section I** would be to understand the state of complexities of ethical positions in different forms and aspects. **Section II** of the writing would be dealing to identify different *types* and *factors* behind ethical misconduct in the publication context. **Section III** would involve identifying possible implications on account of breach of ethical principles. Moreover, writing takes the basis of arguing that unethical commitment in the aspects of delivering findings, publishing ideas can bring severe and reverse consequences to academic community, society and professionalism. **Section IV** would have the end argument for remedies that can be initiated and institutionalised from different parties such as scholars, researchers, academicians, academic institutions, publishing houses and the government.

Keywords: *Ethics, Research, Academic, Professionalism, Ethical Deficit, Community, Society.*

Introduction

The paper argues that ethics have always the assenting implications in the society. Education based on principle of ethics, medical ethics for the good and well-being of the patients, military ethics to guide in war and peace time, ethics throughout the process of research, have all been argued to have significant identity of universal application. Therefore, its importance is argued from different aspects of morality, humanity, legality and significantly having an end focus on

well-being of the community and society. Application of ethics can ensure for social order and build trust on the existence and functioning of any profession. Ethics functions as the disciplining force in the domain of knowledge generation and dissemination. It shapes sound research behaviour towards conducting research on different issues or a subject matter that remains important to be unearthed. It has also been argued that application of ethical principles can standardise our thinking process, thereby to arrive at agreeable point on different issues concerning humanity. Thus, the introductory summary stands arguing that, the application of ethics has the relevance in all fields and professions. Moreover, and in particular, ethics, when drawn in an academia, is always instrumental towards the defense of what we say 'academic integrity'.

'Ethics', etymologically is rooted in ancient Greek 'ethos' with its meaning 'character' or 'personality'. This derived meaning, thus give 'ethics' a meaning implying code or principles to one to decide 'what to choose' or 'to take' for an action. Immanuel Kant, a German Thinker, placed 'ethics' as dealing with question "what should I do?" (Bartneck et al., 2001).

“We may define ethics as the normative science of the conduct of human beings living in societies—a science which judges this conduct to be right or wrong, to be good or bad, or in some similar way” (Lillie, 1957, p. 2).

It is a normative science. It gives a perspective to understand one's action from the lens of good and evil or what is right and morally wrong. But what decides, what action is right and wrong requires theoretical and referential intervention. Here, contrast existed. Reference to two standards be made i.e. Consequentialist Idea and Deontology. Consequential/ism believes in what is good in consequences. It suggests for an action that has the possibility of goodness in the consequences/results. It is, thus to them, the consequence/s of goodness will help to determine an action, even if there comes an action which may subjected to questions of making false or killing. Therefore, unlike deontological arguments, the consequentialist does not believe in the concept of independent existence of consequences from that of defined acts of good and wrong. Deontology, whereas, argues for an act conforming to the standard principles/norms that are morally defined good and wrong. This is what the deontologist argues the existence of moral obligations (whatever of consequence/s) that are independent. Therefore, defining ethics is difficult for general acceptance (Sidgwick, 1906).

Notwithstanding, 'ethics' have been a theory with principles of direction to the morality of doing and accepting what is good for one in relation to other's wellbeing. Ethics involves the question of practicing the principles of morality in different sphere of social interactions and professionalism. Thus, ethics as a branch of philosophy, provides 'code of conduct' for negativising the detrimental consequences to the fellow beings or community at large through our communication or professionalism expression. Furthermore, ethics in research gives the directional progress. It helps picking the right methodology and progress of research work and guides until research results reaches the targeted beneficiaries or community platform.

It is then very pertinent to us to address who then decides what 'ethics' is in academia or in any professionalism? Does ethics differ from one profession to other? Is this legal binding? In fact,

ethics may differ from one professional establishment to other. Ethics as 'code of conduct' or 'rules/principles' of any establishment, in fact, are determined by the nature, function and target of the establishment. Thus, it would be appropriate to term ethics of any establishment, private or public as 'norms or code of conduct' and this provides guidelines to the functioning of responsibilities however, keeping intact the Corporate Social Responsibilities in case of private or government aided establishment. However, there exist what can be considered 'standard principles' while understanding the concept of ethics, these are principles of honesty, integrity and acknowledgement or valuing for others.

Academic and non-academic publications commit to adhere to the philosophy of sharing ideas/findings on different relevant subject matters or issues. Publication and Publishing houses, academicians, scholars, independent researcher and individuals acquainted with writings must follow the principle of convincing in the quality of writings and publications. This is where adhering to the ethics both from the publishing houses and the later has to be ensured. Adhering to ethics is very important in maintaining the status of professionalism. Functioning through professionalism is always in correlation to beneficiaries. Therefore, professional experts in different fields such as in teaching, medical, legal field and so on have to be obliged to institutionally framed ethical principles. However, such practices have been a challenge these days. Also to think of academic integrity without commitment to the standard academic principles would mean helping to lose trust in academic contributions.

Section I:

Complex state of Ethical positions due to Publication Misconduct

Having introduced the significance of 'ethics' in any sorts of professionalism and academic integrity, it can be stated that publication acts as a medium through which one can scale the status of valuing the recognised institutional 'ethics.' Here, publication stands for a process through which existing or revisited content can be made available to communities. Publication can be through different modes such as in writing in academic or non-academic standards in journals, magazines, books, souvenir and on online platforms. The main objective of publication depends on the motive of author what s/he thinks relevant in the subject-matter or an issue being chosen. However, the central focus of any publication is to make the ideas, information or an analysis available to targeted readers or public at large. However, in an academic and professional context publication would mean the same medium but with intended objective of publishing the researched ideas or say the scientific findings in an organised, scientific and systemic way. Before final process of dissemination through publication it requires to fulfil methodological obligation and commitment to accommodate to the philosophy of academic integrity. A quality publication with scientific research findings always has greater influencing scope to academic fraternity as well as to young minds in the classroom.

The central idea of any research and publication is to reach audience/readers/public without

self-restricting to any geography. So, publication has become an important sharing platform to any research findings. It is therefore, *ethics* in publication may refer to standard codes/guiding principles to be abide by author and the publishers.

However, anti-practice to the application of ethics and culture of not adhering to standard codes of publication have become the subject of serious concern in an academic platform and in different profession. 'Publication misconduct' is thus, a process of deviating from the application of ethical codes of standard in publication of ones' finding. Thus, deviation from any 'codified standards norms' would lead to 'misconduct'. This 'publication misconduct', therefore, is an unethical act of publishing any distorted or manipulated ideas or findings. This act is detrimental to the very identity of the author, publisher and the institutions associated with. It takes the scope of misleading the presentation of data/research findings. It is argued that digitisation and open access movement have been causing the sharp rise in the practice of misconduct in research and publication (Abdollahi, et al., 2014).

Therefore, consequences of doing publication misconduct have to be understood and addressed for the sustenance of public faith in academia and any professions, direct or indirectly connected to peoples' interest.

Section II:

Types and push factors contributing to Ethical Misconduct

'Misconduct' is all about not adhering to principles that ought to be. It is basically an act of doing intentionally or deliberately by way of deviating from the accepted standard norms of scientific behaviour (Resnik & Stewart, 2012). To Resnik and Stewart (2012), there can evolve a situation where a work is committed unintentionally, such unintended deviation be considered different from misconduct, rather 'honest'.

Thus, we have concept like Research Misconduct, Publication Misconduct and so on. The unethical behaviour on the part of researcher begins right from his incapacity of choosing an issue or subject for doing an extensive study. Kharasch (2021) argues that scientific misconduct has become so much of practice that the effort to study such unethical behaviour has turned to a full-fledged discipline.

This misconduct can happen in different ways and this may also be categorised as types of publication misconduct.

Plagiarism

Practice of plagiarism has become a common concern in academic writings and publications. It refers to practice of copying someone's else work, words, data or ideas. Here, second person violates the right of original author by not acknowledging his/her authorship.

Masic (2014) states, plagiarism is an “act of appropriation or copying someone else's written, artistic or other creative work as your own, either in part or in whole, without specifying the source or authorship of the original.”

Plagiarism, according to US, The Office of Research Integrity (ORI) 'plagiarism to include both the theft or misappropriation of intellectual property and the substantial unattributed textual copying of another's work' (Al-Lamki, 2009). Further, ORI argues 'The theft or misappropriation of intellectual property includes the unauthorized use of ideas or unique methods obtained by a privileged communication, such as a grant or manuscript review' Al-Lamki, 2009). Masic (2014) refers plagiarism a stolen copy. However, Masic (2014) argues that such plagiarism can be prevented and published can be re-published only under conditions of permission being granted from the concerned publisher and author (Masic, 2014).

Further, Masic (2014) has identified certain causes to plagiarism:

- Trends of academic promotion and research funding, and guided by the principle 'publish at all costs' or 'Perish mantra';
- Personal ambitions of poorly educated individuals;
- Financial pressure (Masic, 2014)

Thus, it is the practice of showing as if it is the work of a person other than the original author. This is unethical. Here, citation misconduct promotes the tradition of academic plagiarism and get reflected of such fault in the process of publication scrutiny. This in fact is serious violation to the Intellectual Property Rights of an individual or a researcher.

Fabrication

It is a serious issue that have been corrupting the research and publication ethics. It refers to manipulation or making data in support of his/her findings or to defend his/her pre- defined conclusions. Here, one presents as if data is being obtained through authentic process of research, which however, is not. Furthermore, Ming (n.d.) cited 'photo manipulation' as another way of making fabrication. This sort of fabrication can distort original meaning and this may be by way of changing original image and colour.

This unethical practice rouses the consequence of misleading and misinterpretation of data or the records in accounts. This may also lead to wrongful selection of data for further research.

Falsification

Falsification is another very serious unethical conduct in the field of research and publication. It refers to the manipulation of data, materials, changing/omitting data so that data or the

findings are not represented the way it should be. This misconduct may basically be practiced to give a manipulative meaning to desired outcome. It is the unethical research behaviour of changing or omitting the data which is of no convincing value to his hypothesis or the results that is to his/her mind. It also involves manipulative application of methods or data which is known to serve his/her desired research result.

Ghost Writing Trend

Ghost writing is the practice of ghost writers. Here, ghost writers remain invisible until disclosed and can be considered seasoned and professional writers. They can also be considered behind the scene content writer. Thus, it is the practice of writing for someone on hire and on exchange for anything agreed. However, the credit and the copywrite is with one for whom and on whose reason is written. Ghost writers are the channeling medium to give a shape to the ideas or experiences in a printed form.

The cited paragraphs, declared by self-identified ghost writer would give good understanding on who ghost writers are and what role they do.

When you don't have the time or the expertise to write your book, I can write it for you. I'll work closely with you to bring your ideas to the printed page. Your book will be written based on your input and in your voice, and you will retain full copyright. The book may be sold or offered under your name alone. I will gladly sign a non-disclosure agreement (Hauck, 2013, p.1)

There are numerous accounts of ghost-writing instances across the countries. Hiring such writers have been a tradition these days amongst busy scheduled politicians, businessman, celebrities and others. In the accounts of instances, the paper may cite few of those involved by the internationally acclaimed figures. *Profiles in Courage*, for which the former US President, John F. Kennedy received the *Pulitzer Prize for Biography* was later confessed, where majority of the work had the role of Theodore Chaikin Sorensen, the US writer, lawyer and presidential speech writer. To him, President often addressed as his "intellectual blood bank" (Rote, 2023). Many books in the name of Hillary R Clinton, former US, First Lady and Senator were said to be the product of writers involved by her. Here, 'It Takes a Village' was the product of Barbara Feinman Todd, a university faculty and a writer (Farhi, 2014). Daftuar (2023) reveals the ghost-writing story behind internationally acclaimed best-selling Book '*Spare*' owned in Prince Harry's name. It was J.R. Moehringer (Daftuar, 2023). For the memoir, 'Spoken from the Heart', the Former US First Lady, Laura Bush acknowledged Lyric Winik, says Farhi (2014). Bush's acknowledgement to Lyric Winik, goes in saying 'helped me put my story into words' but otherwise remained behind the scenes (Farhi, 2014).

In the context of India, it is argued as relatively a new concept by V.K. Karthika, established publisher associated with Westland Books in India (Daftuar, 2023). V.K. Karthika says "If not on the cover as co-author, it would be in the form of royalties, and the writer would be part of a contract with the publisher" (Daftuar, 2023)

Impact of Ghost Writing

It leads to a serious ethical question whether one should have the whole credit of authorship when he/she does not involve in the actual process of writing or in bringing out the findings. Also, it is a matter whether such practice can be considered ethical when due credit of acknowledgement is confessed.

Its negative consequences, may lead to,

- High chance of feeling of being deceived and questioning the Authenticity of the work.
- High chance of misleading the data and results. If this is to happen in medical professional platform its consequences will stand irrevocable and hazardous to peoples' life.
- It will lead to devalue the culture of ethical oriented research.
- Such practice may invite 'pay high, take quality research outcome.'

Unethical Research Conduct

The practice of research without adhering to the standards/ ethics of doing research leads to publication misconduct. It is because publication is the communicating medium for disseminating the research results. It occurs when researcher fails or intentionally tend to practice research in field without informed consent. Such practices violate the academic integrity and the privacy of the participants/ respondents involves. Adopting intended methodology to serve the interest may reflect the conflict of interest. And this at the level publication becomes hard for acceptance because of high chance of negative implications.

Salami Slicing

This practice is considered unethical in the field of publication. It primarily refers to the practice of making many publications out of one work. It can lead to negative implications for readers and researchers while trying to understand findings. More publications out of such misconduct may have the high chance of self-citation leading to unwanted reputation building. Such practice may further invite compromising the quality of research works.

Assessment Disregard

Scientific research or a research paper can have its status and the standard of quality not only in adhering to the principles throughout process of research but also in taking the risk of consequences of the findings in the academic community or in society. This 'assessment' post publication of the research paper/s is essentially important. Further research can be initiated if found disadvantageous.

Factors contributing misconduct in publications

The culture of not adhering to the standards of research writing and publications are the result of many factors.

1. Lack of Research orientation: It results challenge from stage of choosing topic to engagement throughout the research process.
2. Lack of Research Accountability
3. Publication as mandatory criteria for academic Job Entry and Career Advancement
4. Existence of ghost-writing Trends
5. Funding Agencies Interest
6. Metrics for Reputation
7. Public Image Building
8. Corporate Policy Advancement
9. Lack of uniformity in the Duration of Publication
10. Lack of stringent Publishing Policy and regulations over frequency of Predatory Journals.
11. Lack of stringent action against publishers promoting publications not adhering to standards of research and ethics.
12. Royalty Offer
13. Lack of mandatory Research lessons in the undergraduate Curriculum

Section III

Possible implications on account of breach of Ethical principles in Research, Academic and Professionalism

Publication misconduct is a menace in the field of ideas communication. It may bring detrimental effect in different ways, to scientific research, academic community and society.

1. Challenge to Research Credibility
2. Challenge to Academic Integrity
3. Conflict of Interest
4. Challenge to identity, professionalism and personal reputation of a researcher or the author

5. Infringement on Intellectual Property Rights
6. Violation on Copyrights
7. Psychological Trouble
8. Challenge to Reputation of Publishing House
9. Compromise in the Quality publication
10. Misleading information to the society and academic community.
11. Quantity Publication take over Quality work.
12. Corrupt the Policy making process
13. May open for Ideological conflict.
14. Detrimental to Human Health and Social cohesion
15. Misuse of Time and Public resources
16. Chance of misusing Publication as medium to sell corporate ideas on product wrongfully.
17. It may encourage more Fabricated publications
18. Trust Deficit in Research and Professional Expertise
19. Legal Consequences

Section IV

The publication misconduct has been a challenge. Such acts, whether deliberate or accidental, can leave detrimental consequences. Therefore, all effort be set rationally for the interest of academia, scholarship, any other professionalism, community and society at the end. For this reason, following points may serve the interest of overcoming the risk of non-compliance with ethical standards.

1. Compulsory Research Orientation on Ethics
2. Compulsory and Rigorous training on Research Methodology to people associated with research in different discipline.
3. In house regulation by the Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) in College and Universities must mandatorily ensure the submission of papers by faculties for promotion meet the ethical standards
4. Lesson on Ethics be included in academic and professional curriculum
5. Legal action against individuals and publishing houses for not adhering to standard ethical principles.

6. Standard duration policy for publication to avoid differences amongst publishing houses
7. Mandatory criteria for Career Advancement through publications have to be regulated
8. Peer Reviewers should have knowledge on the field, community and place on which the work is planned or forwarded for review
9. Expertise and High Experiences on Subject/Issue should be accounted beforehand selection to Reviewers from either home or overseas.
10. Pay and Publish Trend (PPT) should be regulated for quality and ethical matter
11. Standard digital policy has to be formulated to regulate mushrooming in Online Publication
12. Regulations be formulated for proper and ethical use of Artificial Intelligence
13. Stringent ethical guidelines for any Funding agencies (Public and Private).

Moreover, in social science research, researcher must strictly adhere to avoid chance of bias when dealing the social issues. Objectivity is highly crucial to deter the habit of unethical practice.

In fact, the first ever institutionalised initiative to address and prevent the menace of scientific misconduct and dishonesty was in the foundation of the Office of Research Integrity (ORI) in U.S, 1992 (Masic, 2014). This institution, Masic (2014) cites, initiated stringent policy to sanction plagiarism in USA. This was followed with the institution of Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) in UK in 1997 (Masic, 2014).

Moreover, in India, it has always been the effort to control the culture of cloned and the predatory publications. More of recent, the University Grant Commission, the institution for invigilating Higher institutions for quality education and Research in India has initiated steps like Consortium of Academic and Research Ethics (CARE). Its official order, in fact, sends clear and strong message to detect and deter the hazard of plagiarism (UGC, 2017).

Moreover, solution to such dishonest practice also lies, greatly in the honest, rational and professional commitment to the consequences.

Conclusion

Thus, the present work convinces the fact that Research and thereafter activity of publication without ethics would mean unethical and its consequences being detrimental to the academic integrity and any profession. Such an unethical practice if continues, research will be under scanner of questions in its credibility and relevance of investing resources. Liberal in the conduct of publication without standard principles may bring unconvincing and reverse outcome in any discipline.

It thus concludes arguing 'ethics' as an inevitable principle for standardising the work in academic platform or any profession. Deviating to oblige ethics would lead the practice of deceiving the readers or the academic community with false and twist narratives and ideas. This unethical conduct refers to 'misconduct' can have damaging effect when applied to publications. Moreover, such kind of manipulative publications in medical sciences would bring far and wide chaos and confusion amongst the medical service receivers. Abdollahi, et al. (2014) are of the opinion that pharmaceutical agencies often hires professional writers, sound in medical for writing medical reports and on drug guidelines. They argue, when ethical obligation of relationships between Pharma and hired professional writers are hidden, there occurs misconduct with greater health consequences. Furthermore, what they believed is that it cannot be resolved even when retractions on publication is held (Abdollahi, et al., 2014).

In fact, all chances will be 'questions' around the reliability in the very, what we refer 'scientific research'.

Therefore, it is good for us all to adhere to the standards of writing and publishing what is authentic through rigorous research. This can happen convincingly through our commitment in the process of research orientation for ethics training and perspective for conducting research on relevant issues, thereby serving the society and humanity. Honest, rational and legal commitment, fundamentals to knowledge contribution and uncompromising adherence, by every fellows in academia, to the principle of Intellectual Property Rights and institutionalised governance over the application of ethics in different aspects can be best and only ways to (re)institute reliability and good faith in 'research', 'research findings' and 'positive implications of research'.

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