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Duplicate and Redundant Publications What Authors and Editors need to know?

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Abstract: In the course of assessing publications for academic promotions over the years, one has come across severally papers by the same author(s) which overlap very significantly and should not have been presented as different publications. It is understandable that academics and researchers in institutions of higher learning, research institutes or industry desire to have their research findings disseminated in the form of publications in peer-reviewed journals. Such publications give immense exposure to the authors

And are a boost to industry and for academic staff in universities, such publications are an essential requirement for gaining tenure and/or promotion in their jobs- the so called “public or perish phenomenon”

The “public or perish phenomenon” puts intense pressure on academics to publish because quantity (and not necessarily quality) gives great advantage. The undesirable consequences of this phenomenon are duplicate and redundant publications.

What are Duplicate and Redundant publications?

A duplicate publication is an article that overlaps substantially with another manuscript; although the texts are rarely the same,¹⁻³ other names used to describe the practice are dual, repetitive, disaggregated or fragmented publications.^{4,5}

Redundant publication, of which duplicate publications is a subset, is defined by the committee on publication Ethics (COPE) in their guideline on Good publication practice “...as when two or more papers, without full cross reference, share the same hypothesis, data, discussion points or conclusions”⁶

In duplicate publication, the papers usually differ only slightly in changes to the title, abstract (summary) and/or order of authors. The text is usually identical or nearly so. In redundant publication, there is usually a somewhat different textual slant in the

body of the paper from the original paper but the data are same. The differences often come in the forms of different interpretation of data or an introduction from a slightly different angle.

The defining factors in duplicate and/or redundant publication is lack of cross reference. The editor of the journals the papers submitted do not have knowledge of the existence of either publication. The authors present the paper as different works and what they read as much.

Generating more than one manuscript from a single data set may be legitimate in some instance provided that they are cross-referenced and each manuscript addresses a distinct question.” Salami Science” refers to the slicing of a data set in to several pieces called least publishable units.⁵ The quality of such units is often questionable.

Duplicate publication may be picked during peer review of manuscripts if the journals are fully indexed using search engines like PubMed. In resource-poor settings and especially with local or institutional journals which may not be indexed, duplicate publications may be missed entirely.

Duplicate or redundant publication is entirely different from plagiarism or copy-right violation which refers to unauthorized publication of someone else's work and claiming same one's original work. While duplicate or redundant publication could be described as a misdemeanor, plagiarism is a serious academic fraud.

Why duplicate and/or redundant publications occur.

Authors often give several answers when confronted with allegations of duplicate and/or redundant publication. "We did not know the overlap was significant", "The other paper was for a different audience", "We did not know that this other similar answers. One answer that is almost never acknowledged is "We want to improve on our CV". As stated earlier, academic productivity is measured most often in numbers of publications. Quality is usually secondary.

Why duplicate/redundant publications are bad and should be discouraged.

There are three reasons why duplicate and redundant publications are bad and should be discouraged.

Firstly and most important, they have the potential to skew evidence. When two or more papers, not cross-referenced, are published from the same dataset, and are read as different studies, they will be assumed to be strong. They can affect the outcomes of meta-analyses which are used to establish best practices. This was demonstrated in the study by Tramer et al.⁷ and can have far-reaching consequences.

Secondly, they can impugn a journal's reputation. When one reads a research report in a journal, one wants an assurance that what is being read is original and contains some (unique) information. Duplicate publications when found out destroy this trust and this is not good for the journal.

Third, duplicate and/or redundant publications "waste" journal space which is very competitive in academic and scientific publishing. Every paper

published in journal is expected to carry a message. If the message is re-cycle, it is of little or no use. Duplicate and redundant publications also waste the time and limited resources of editorial and peer-review system.

How to avoid duplicate and/redundant publication.

To avoid duplicate or redundant publication, authors need to i) be aware of the practice, ii) appreciate that the practice is wrong and iii) be open with editors when submitting manuscripts for publication especially when in doubt of possible overlap of papers submitted either to same or different journal.

Editors of journals on their part must be clear in their instructions to authors on policies on duplicate and/or redundant publications. Editors should insist that all authors listed in manuscripts submitted for publication sign, acknowledging authorship. It is not unknown for some authors to claim ignorance of manuscripts in which they are listed as co-authors.

Editors also must avoid undue delayed in handing manuscripts. Editorial decision on submitted manuscripts should be done with dispatch as delays are often cited as reason for submission of same manuscript to more than one journal.

Conclusion

In this era evidence- based medicine, the medical profession depends on published literature to determine best practices, everyone, therefore, researchers as well as practitioners have vested interest in the integrity of published literature, Editors of medical journals have the onerous responsibility of ensuring that all papers published in their journals satisfy the highest standards of scientific integrity⁸. Journals provide the forum for sharing of information within the academic community and this makes for progress. While authors need the visibility and the academic points which publications in journals provide, they (authors) must at all times consider the greater interest of the larger society. Editors and reviewers have limited capacity to pick up duplicate, redundant or even plagiarized papers so that, ultimately, the integrity of any published paper rests with the individual author⁹. Authors guarantee the integrity of scientific literature. We must hold ourselves accountable.

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