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ETHICS AND SCIENTIFIC PUBLICATION IN UKRAINE: THE CURRENT STATE

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Abstract

The issue of ethics in scientific publications remains both relevant and of paramount importance. The literature has extensively documented misconduct issues, problems in publishing and ethics all around the world. Scimago Journal and Country Rank ranked Ukraine in the 45th position globally, underscoring its significant presence in the global research landscape. Despite the good position, from personal observation in scientific publications in Ukraine, the weak sides are the absence of a clear hypothesis, predatory publication, plagiarism, and incorrect citation. The prevalent tendency in the Ukrainian academic community «to publish for the sake of publication, not to be read or cited» is a concern that should be addressed. This inclination is one of the primary issues contributing to the challenges mentioned above. The academic community in Ukraine must shift its focus toward producing high-quality, impactful research that not only gets published but is also read, cited, and contributes to the advancement of knowledge.

Keywords: Ethics; Plagiarism; Publishing; Ethics Committees, Research; Editorial policies.

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Key Messages for Research and Practice

- Addressing ethical concerns in research is increasingly important for the global publishing enterprise.
- The Ukrainian scholarly community should prioritize the quality and impact of publications.
- Evidence-based hypothesis formulation is essential for the credibility and implications of Ukrainian research reports.

The literature has extensively documented misconduct issues, problems in publishing and ethics all around the world [1]. According to PubMed, the very first publication on «ethics and scientific publication» was published in 1920. The peak of publications was in 2018 with 11 096 results and up to date, 51 338 results are available on PubMed. These data prove the statement that for years and centuries, the issue of ethics in scientific publication has remained both relevant and of paramount importance. Academic societies carry out preventative or issue-solved actions to continue the high value of science around the world [2].

In the high-cited journals, editors spent half of their time solving the potential misconduct issues, made mainly by the author [3]. The situation concerning journals with lower impact factors may be more challenging. Predatory journals are not a topic of discussion, and they undermine the ethical standards of academic publishing. These journals encourage unethical practices, including self-plagiarism and content duplication [1]. As a consequence, discussions regarding ethics in scientific publication have progressed over time, leading to the development of established guidelines and regulations for researchers and journal editors on how to conduct research and publish it with integrity.

To gain insight into the present state of ethics and publication issues in Ukraine, I explored a few medical and scientific journal websites to review the Author Guidelines. In all cases, information about Publication Ethics was available on the Journal's website in different categories: under «Author Guidelines», «Main Page», and «Journal Policies», etc. The precise searching allows me to find necessary tabs, but it might be not very clear for other researchers. It is needed to highlight the improved quality of published manuscripts and journal policies in Ukraine compared to when I first began my writing journey years ago. Nowadays, it is obligatory to follow recommendations and guidelines by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) and the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) in most Ukrainian journals.

Despite the general positive overview, there are some areas for improvement I see in practice as a reviewer and teacher in Ukraine.

Quantity, not quality. Every year, medical academic staff are obliged to report the number of scientific publications. The authors are tempted to «divide» the results and publish more articles, ignoring the fact of further readability and citation.

Pay and publish abroad. Publishing abroad increases the personal (do you mean personal recognition increases?) rate in the academic report. Many nongovernmental or public organizations outside Ukraine create conferences, mostly multidisciplinary, with catchy names and invite Ukrainian authors to submit an abstract with the privilege of online participation [4]. The price is typically low, and researchers are happy to submit abstracts even in Ukrainian. Finally, the abstract book is multilanguage and multidisciplinary, without peer-review or editing. This publication will be counted as «publication abroad».

Predatory publication. Predatory journals are one of the primary diseases in publishing nowadays. After the first successful publication in a good journal, the authors receive lots of imitation to be published fast in «indexed» journals. Unfortunately, the publishing houses create unknown indexes to deceive young authors [5]. From my humble experience with students, they are excited to receive invitations from foreign journals and are aware of predatory journals.

References. Another dark side of reviewed articles. I see a trend between students and PhD-students to cite non peer-reviewed articles, thesis of conferences, local guidelines, etc. This leads to the thought that the Google Scholar search system was used.

Self-citation. Up to date, there are not so popular issues in Ukraine. As opposed to Ukrainian authors, being a reviewer at Elsevier journals, I remarked a high self-citation among foreign authors.

Multi Authorship. Many post-soviet countries still use the template: «The first author has to be the head of department/hospital/university/institution». Slowly, this tradition has changed to insert the principal researcher at the end, acknowledge support in the special section, or even skip if they do not fulfil the authorship contribution section.

Single-authorship. Single-authorship is less common in the collaborative research community nowadays; nevertheless, it remains a testament to the capacity of a single mind to conceive, execute, and communicate scientific findings. It might be an option for a review, case report, or opinion but not for diagnostic studies, which require two independent estimations.

The lack of evidence. This is a significant concern in academic writing. The article loses

credibility, and transparency becomes ineffective. There needs to be more evidence to replicate the research.

Not problem-solving. No hypothesis – no problems – no results. The absence of a clear hypothesis indeed presents a fundamental challenge. Without a statement that proposes a possible explanation for a phenomenon, it is incorrect to formulate research questions and design experiments or investigations. Hypothesis gives direction and purpose and must be included in the Study design. The hypothesis is a cornerstone in many articles published in Ukrainian medical journals.

Plagiarism. For non-Anglophone authors, it is challenging to write in English [6]. The temptation to «borrow» phrases from more experienced authors might exceed the regulated number (typically six words), which can result in plagiarism. Moreover, there needs to be more accurate citations or proper citations.

Translation. Some authors might translate their manuscript from Ukrainian into English and submit it to another journal again.

AI tools. The novel AI tools are spreading the word, and Ukraine is no exception. For instance, ChatGPT might assist in language support in writing the Introduction or Discussion part. Nevertheless, the users should remind themselves of the responsibility and accessibility of their searches, which might be dangerous while working on the Results section.

In general, the prevalent tendency in the Ukrainian academic community «to publish for the sake of publication, not to be read or cited» is a concern that should be addressed. This inclination is one of the primary issues contributing to the challenges mentioned above. The academic community in Ukraine must shift its focus toward producing high-quality, impactful research that not only gets published but is also read, cited, and contributes to the advancement of knowledge.

Nevertheless, Ukraine is on the way to conducting high-quality studies and being published in high-impact journals. On the reputable database and platform Scimago journal and Country Rank, Ukraine is ranked 45th in the world, which suggests that Ukraine has a notable presence in the global research landscape. Ukrainian researchers actively contribute to the global scientific community in terms of research output. International collaboration and research funding might enhance the quality and visibility of our research [7].

In the field of medical research, Ukraine has seen the emergence of innovative start-up medical journals that rigorously uphold editorial standards, offering promising potential to advance the dissemination of valuable healthcare knowledge and discoveries. These emerging medical journals in Ukraine prioritize ethical standards in research and publication, ensuring the integrity, transparency, and credibility of the content they publish. This commitment to ethics is fundamental in advancing the quality and trustworthiness of medical research.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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