

EDITORIAL

PLEASE STOP CHEATING-ACADEMIC DISHONESTY IN RESEARCH

The complaint registered by a faculty in my institute, as chairman of the Plagiarism standing and Review committee, I tried to facilitate him. He claimed that the data belonging to his M.Phil. research has been published by some faculty members in one of the journals, hence stealing the data. Upon preliminary inquiry, I found that the claims of the faculty were correct, but I was not in a position to take action as the authors of that research papers as well as the journal both did not belong to my institute. On my advice, he complained to the journal for retracting the article. Anyway, after 3 months of communication, an internal inquiry by the editorial board of that journal, and comments from the deanery of my institute, the article was retracted recently. The data was labeled as plagiarized- a typical form of academic dishonesty.

There are different forms of academic dishonesty. All these are collectively grouped into 3; data falsification, data fabrication, and plagiarism¹. Data falsification means deliberately manipulating the research data to extract the results of a researcher's choice. The reasons may be, manipulating the data for personal ease, lack of commitment, lack of time, and many others. Examples include manipulating the research hypothesis in cases of drug trials in cases of pharmaceutically sponsored studies, rounding up the figures of different variables in a study like blood pressure readings, and adding the results of variables where the data has never been collected. Data fabrication is defined as creating a new record of data or results. Examples include filling forms related to informed consent, adding data sets and variables into SPSS where the data has never been collected. Plagiarism is defined as presenting others' ideas, work, data, and results as one's own without acknowledging these. All these may be collectively called as 'deception'. Unintentional deception is called "academic dishonesty", while intentional one can be called a "fraud"².

The reasons behind these academic ailments may be fame, promotions, recruitments, habit, and lack of knowledge, to say a few. The culture of "publish or perish" is another important factor, where the researchers exhibit these traits because of lack of knowledge, greed, pressures, and many other factors³.

The problem of academic dishonesty and fraud in research is prevalent in Pakistani culture in almost all academic institutions. Examples include, "research for sale culture", where people are dedicated for this purpose, develop research proposals, thesis, and research papers for needy students. This phenomenon is prevalent in postgraduate students of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Pakistan (CPSP), post-

graduate nursing institutes, allied medical institutes, and even general education to say a few. The individual institutes and regulating agencies have turned a blind eye to this menace. Sometimes, the faculty belonging to some institutes promote this culture either to promote students to the next grades or for personal gains.

The Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan has developed a plagiarism policy for educational institutions in the country, and it has yielded fruitful results till now⁴. Many cases of plagiarism have been pointed out till now, and faculty members belonging to different institutions have been punished based on this policy. The HEC should be more proactive in curbing the problem of fraud and academic dishonesty. Similarly, the faculty, research supervisor, and students must be educated right from the start of academic sessions about this topic. The governmental agencies should come up with new legislation about academic fraud and dishonesty and the educational institutions need to implement these. Institutional research ethics committees should take proactive roles in implementing the culture of ethical approvals for research before starting it, and the journal should discourage publishing research work without prior ethical approval. The CPSP, nursing and allied institutions, and others should reflect upon these malpractices among postgraduate students and implement mechanisms to prevent research fraud being conducted by some of the students belonging to these academic organizations. Research studies are needed in the country to estimate the magnitude of the problem and highlight it in different forums.

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