

EDITORIAL

Publish but don't tarnish

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The higher education in Pakistan is under constant change and during the last two decades it has seen many new initiatives in the way it is organized or developed. The impetus of change has sent many ripples in all spheres and layers of education continuum creating a competitive environment. The change has found many institutions and individuals at different level of readiness and has led in certain instances of inappropriate responses, collective or individual, such as plagiarism.

Derived from the Latin word *plagiarius* (literally kidnapper), the word plagiarism is used to denote someone stealing someone else's work. In 1601, the word plagiarism was introduced in England and described as someone guilty of literally theft.¹ Plagiarism is generally referred to as unauthorized use of an author's original work either copying it as such or slightly modifying it or wrongful appropriation and purloining and publication of another author's thoughts, ideas, or expressions²⁻⁴.

Plagiarism although considered not a crime but generally carries immense academic dishonesty and breach of ethics and demands expulsion⁵. The continuous and rapid development of modern information technology and web access to thousands of reading material and literature as well as code sources, images, sounds and videos has made copying and pasting quite common among researchers^{5, 6} and is described as being rampant among universities and any kind of discipline⁷. The Higher Education Commission (HEC) Pakistan website, list 9 faculty members of different Universities who are black listed on the basis of plagiarism and there are many more under investigations⁸.

Various reasons have been explained for indulging in plagiarism including a cut throat competitive environment, deadline pressures and an increasingly efficiency based academic environment promote "publish or perish" culture. As per previously published data, plagiarism is identified as a common problem in all institutions nationally and internationally⁷.

Internal Plagiarism (a term referring to use your own published data without following proper procedures and editorial consent) is also not uncommon. In 2007, five teachers from Punjab University India and 06 Professors and the Director of AIMS (All India Institute Medical Sciences) were accused of re-publishing their own material in different periodicals on different occasions⁹. The issue of self-plagiarism is of utmost importance in Pakistan and has been reported many times to the notice of editors of medical journals. This problem is more prevalent perhaps because of the fact that the highly influential professorial staff who after publishing their manuscripts in international journals manage to publish more or less the same thing in local journals¹⁰.

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Plagiarism at academic institutions is a big challenge to maintain academic standards. It is found among different tiers of student populations and in some instances due to lack of their understanding that they are committing the academic dishonesty. There are no uniform guidelines on controlling mechanisms on plagiarism leading to required training, poor monitoring and appropriate reporting¹¹. In a study of 365 students of universities of Pakistan, it was found that due to lack of optimum plagiarism awareness and institutions protocols among the study participants, many participants admitted to poor knowledge regarding plagiarism and many of them admitted that they have¹². Plagiarism has become a driving force for certain individuals to increase their academic statuses and to receive monetary benefits¹¹. Shirazi et al⁷ rightly pointed out in their study that only 18% of medical students and 23% of faculty members knew about the copyright rules while only 18% of medical students and 27% in faculty reported no plagiarism in their practice so far.

A variety of computerized databases (plagiarism detectors) is available globally to detect the plagiarized text¹³. The research of plagiarism detection is a bit chaotic but with the advent of the PAN 2009 conference all the research was brought together and thus nowadays the field is more centralized and there is no absolute way to perform plagiarism detection or gold standard model that should be used¹⁴. The TURNITIN program, made available by HEC in the Degree awarding institutions, for plagiarism detection is highly effective in identifying similarity with regards to both internal and external plagiarism. Unfortunately, TURNITIN is very rarely practiced else where in Pakistan, perhaps due to the cost of the software, shortage of computer literacy and of lack of trainings.

Therefore, we conclude that plagiarism is a serious issue not globally but locally as well. We need to conduct more awareness campaigns to reduce the practice of copying and pasting. This will bring more quality in our published literature and generation of local evidence in healthcare industry. We also recommend that software such as TURNITIN should be available widely in all institutions; media houses and in the journal offices for quick check. The punishment for plagiarism should be standardized and HEC blacklisting and inquiries should be taken seriously by the institutions and government.

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