

Report

The Editor and the Author at Fault: A Lesson From Recent Retractions

Amin Talebi Bezmin Abadi, PhD^{1*}¹Department of Bacteriology, Faculty of Medical Sciences, Tarbiat Modares University, Tehran, Iran**Abstract**

Many reported scientific misconducts included duplication, data fabrication and falsification; but recent fake peer reviews have become strange news for many researchers worldwide. Using gmail and other non-academic emails to correspond with journals should be highly prohibited. Indeed, the dark part of this story is lack of conscience by editors who run some journals. Our suggestion in this paper can decrease the chance of repeating similar retractions in close future.

Keywords: Author, Editorial board, Retraction, Scientific misconduct

Cite this article as: Talebi Bezmin Abadi A. The editor and the author at fault: a lesson from recent retractions. Arch Iran Med. 2018;21(8):376–377.

Received: April 8, 2018, Accepted: April 18, 2018, ePublished: August 1, 2018

Introduction

With regard to biomedical science, it is a common belief that final publication is the main output of scientific activity. Designing well-written proposals followed by years of experimental efforts usually results in interesting publications. In the last decades, the fever of writing scientific papers has disseminated.¹ Meanwhile, number of scientific misconducts has also increased manifolds.^{2,3} Although most reported scientific misconducts included duplication, data fabrication and falsification; recently, fake peer reviews have become a shocking type of scientific misconduct. The purpose of this report is not to justify authors who commit above-mentioned plagiarisms,^{4,5} but I aim to report a shortcut to decrease the number of global retractions due to fake peer reviews.⁶

Fake Peer Review-Based Retractions

In recent years, the weblog “retraction watch” has frequently reported that some of the published papers by *Elsevier* and *Springer* publishers are the result of the fabricated reviewing process.^{4,6} The story is easy to comprehend: misuse of the “suggested reviewers” option during the submission steps. In other words, authors deliberately put some fake emails similar to famous scientists’ names and suggest it to the journals. To be honest, the dark part of this story is lack of conscience by editors who run some journals. Indeed, for the high ranked journals, it is not acceptable that they should need authors’ input to find the best reviewers! In other words, a journal which actively publishes papers on a specific topic should have a list of potential expert reviewers.

Of course, these authors misused the lack of editorial activity in these journals and it should be a disgrace, but it cannot decrease from editorial responsibilities. In one of these journals, some of the editorial board members have already passed away for years, but the journal is still active! It seems that new policy in selecting editorial members should be initiated. To be honest, this round of retractions is an alarming voice for everyone; including authors, reviewers, editors and also publishers. Authors should be aware that we are not living in the seventeen century! Editors should be informed that they need a trustful list of potential reviewers who are both honest and scientific in commenting on the received manuscripts. Additionally, it is highly recommended to discard this faulty option within the submission process. Last but not least, using gmail and other non-academic emails to correspond with journals should be highly prohibited, at least for reviewers. Nowadays, publishers and editors have no other way but to accept their faults in recent retractions. Our suggestion can decrease the chance of repeating similar retractions in the future of scientific publishing.

Conflict of Interest Disclosures

None.

Ethical Statement

Not applicable.

References

1. Steen RG, Casadevall A, Fang FC. Why has the number of scientific retractions increased? PLoS One. 2013;8(7):e68397. doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0068397.

2. Grieneisen ML, Zhang M. A comprehensive survey of retracted articles from the scholarly literature. *PLoS One*. 2012;7(10):e44118. doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0044118.
3. Fang FC, Steen RG, Casadevall A. Misconduct accounts for the majority of retracted scientific publications. *Proc Natl Acad Sci U S A*. 2012;109(42):17028-33. doi: 10.1073/pnas.1212247109.
4. Callaway E. Publisher pulls 58 articles by Iranian scientists over authorship manipulation. *Nature*. 2016. doi: 10.1038/nature.2016.20916.
5. Science journal retracts 107 research papers by Chinese authors. *South China Morning Post*; 2017. Available from: <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/society/article/2089973/science-journal-retracts-107-research-papers-chinese-authors>.
6. Elsevier retracting 26 papers accepted because of fake reviews. *Retraction Watch*; 2017. Available from: <http://retractionwatch.com/2017/12/21/elsevier-retracting-26-papers-accepted-fake-reviews/>.

 © 2018 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.