

LETTER TO EDITOR

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UNDERSTANDING PLAGIARISM

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The word Plagiarism is derived from a Latin word 'plagium' which means - kidnapping someone. "Plagiarism is the act of appropriating the literary composition of another, or parts or passages of his writings, or the ideas or language of the same, and passing them off as the product of one's mind". Plagiarism does not only have to be the copied work of published data of another author but also using colleagues' work and even our own previously published research work without referencing called as self-plagiarism. However, in India, self-plagiarism is not yet a crime under the Indian Copyright Act, 1957.

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Understanding Plagiarism:

What does plagiarism exactly mean? In simple words – it is the use of another person’s words, research ideas or concepts without giving him/her credit and is considered to be a severe offense as it is dishonest to the profession. According to Koul et al. (2009) plagiarism is a kind of a cheat in which one author takes credit for other’s intellectual work/information/ idea/concept/research findings without acknowledging the original author (1).

The word Plagiarism is derived from a Latin word ‘plagium’ which means - kidnapping someone. “Plagiarism is the act of appropriating the literary composition of another, or parts or passages of his writings, or the ideas or language of the same, and passing them off as the product of one’s mind” (2). Plagiarism does not only have to be the copied work of published data of another author but also using colleagues’ work and even our own previously published research work without referencing called as self-plagiarism. However, in India, self-plagiarism is not yet a crime under the Indian Copyright Act, 1957.

As the internet is easily accessible, the research data and information is made available through various online databases, which is considered as the main reason for plagiarism. This is one of many serious issues in Indian research and should be addressed by every researcher, investigator and even by the institutes and universities. Students and investigators should understand that plagiarism is a crime in the area of research and the offender can be called in a court for compensation for copying someone’s work as it is a violation of the Law of copyright. In recent years, one of the professors from south India, lost his professional career, reputation in the field and he was exposed to media and websites because of self-plagiarism. The Western countries are an inspiration to the world for their strict honor codes against plagiarism. In the recent past, developing countries like India have also started focusing on plagiarism in medical academics and research as such malpractices are increasing. It is observed that there are many journals offering faster manuscript publications without following the review process at some cost (as manuscript handling charges). This encourages low-quality research in our field. Therefore, the original work of any researcher is published in good scientific journals only after the critical

review done by peers or at least by 2-4 reviewers. This may delay the process of publication and may take up to 1 - 1.5 year of time from the date of manuscript submission.

Some Indian academic universities have mandated to have minimum plagiarism (less than 10%) in a postgraduate and doctoral thesis. UGC (University Grants Commission) - which is the regulating body of higher education in India, has provided rules and guidelines to follow to avoid plagiarism in the research field which is made mandatory for deemed as well as academic universities. If anyone fails to abide by these rules and guidelines, disciplinary action can be taken for this academic offense. As it is necessary for maintaining the academic standard of a particular profession, a strong statutory authority for taking strict actions against academic plagiarism must be established.

The institute is a primary level where plagiarism can be prevented. This can be done by constant guidance and verification by existing professors for high-quality and original research work. According to previous studies on the perception of plagiarism among college students, it was observed that the students do not have a clear idea about what plagiarism means and the proper methods to avoid it (3,4,5). Park C (2003) stated that students might unknowingly plagiarize the information due to lack of understanding about plagiarism as they are not aware of the proper techniques to use the information/ data with appropriate citing and referencing which is one of the main reasons for plagiarism (6). Therefore, it is essential to conduct classes to educate the importance of novel work and how plagiarism is against the reputation of our profession, moral professional ethics, and methods to avoid it, etc.

The college website must include an explanation about plagiarism and methods to avoid it. Institutes must encourage students to publish their research only in reputed scientific journals and provide funds from research grants.

Many medical Universities in Maharashtra including Maharashtra University of Health Sciences, Nashik; Deemed to be University like- PIMS, Loni; Dr. DY Patil-, Pune & Mumbai; MGMIHS, Navi Mumbai have recommended PG students and Ph.D. scholars to verify their theses and dissertations through proper anti-plagiarism software and browsing through “Shodh-Ganga- a reservoir of Indian theses” & attach a report during submissions. This will ensure

the originality/novelty of research work. Dr. Vithalrao Vikhe Patil Foundation has provided Anti-plagiarism software by Urkund (efficient and reliable plagiarism detector) for medical, physiotherapy and nursing students, faculty and research scholars.

Every institute must display and follow the policy for the strict prohibition of plagiarism.

Policies related to plagiarism in India:

- According to section 57 of the Indian Copyright Act, 1957 authors have the right to claim their authorship for original work and facilitate the professional ethical practice in research.
- According to Section 63 & Section 63 (A) of the Indian Copyright Act, 1957 infringement is considered as the criminal offense and eligible for punishment or penalty for its violation.
- University Grants Commission of India (UGC India), which is the regulatory body for higher educational universities in India, accepted the new policy (2018) which includes four tiers for focusing plagiarism. First tier- plagiarism up to 10%- no fine; second tier 10% to 40% plagiarism –a revised manuscript/ thesis is to be submitted ; third-tier 40% to 60% plagiarism –student suspension for one year and annual increment of the faculty/guide is stopped for next 2 years and prohibited from guiding students for next 2 years; tier four - > 60% plagiarism then admission can be canceled for the said course along with the fine (costs around 2 years of annual increment)and a 3 -year ban to guide students. Repeated offenses are liable for disciplinary action, including suspension or termination.
- According to Mr. Raghuram (Vice president of the Society for Scientific Values) - “What India needs is a comprehensive, government-mandated regulation that defines and penalizes misconduct in all of the academics, not just science”. (*Anubhav Pandey- Laws relating to Plagiarism in India, Rajiv Gandhi National University of Law*)

Important steps to avoid plagiarism

- When paraphrasing the words or information, the source of information must be cited correctly. Citing is a method of giving credit to the original author or a source for their work. Paraphrasing means rewriting the sentence

after reading the complete article, understanding its important findings and after critically analyzing writing the information in your own words with proper quoting of a reference in Vancouver / Harvard style.

- Whenever writing about a particular law, theory or research finding, it is important to give credit to the original author or a source and we are bound to acknowledge it.
- Students must follow academic codes of professional ethics to avoid plagiarism during their professional careers.
- Students may be made compulsory to attend the training workshops which includes different types of plagiarism in research and methods avoid them
- Students can be informed about plagiarism and its outcome through pamphlets.
- Project guides or professors should focus on appropriate citations of references wherever needed while reviewing the thesis/ project.

Free and commercial software's are available online for institutes, postgraduate teachers, Ph.D. supervisors to review the authenticity of the thesis/projects of students. Anti- plagiarism software searches thousands of journals, many databases, research papers and web pages for plagiarism. Some of them are - Turnitin, Thenticate, Anti-plagiarism, Dupli checker, Paper rater, Plagiarism checker Plagiarism detector, Plagiarism.net, Plagium, plagtracker, Viper, etc(7).

Although in the era of globalization, the latest technologies or the internet may have a significant contribution to plagiarism, each responsible investigator should contribute to robust scientific research legally, ethically, morally to avoid academic misconduct for providing novel scientific research practice in India.

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