

Plagiarism - time to strike at the epidemic

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We live in a globalized world where information is instantly shared across continents. The number of biomedical journals available for reference is quite enormous and there is a sudden huge surge of free open access journals in the last few years. The publications of articles take place at a rate beyond anybody's comprehension. Thus, it is understandably difficult to keep track of who has added what into the different volumes of issues and piles of the scientific literature available in our media technology today (1).

The current volume of information, new knowledge or educational material produced by the academia in fulfillment of research, teaching or service related requirements is unprecedented. So are those of students along with the diversification of programs as basic requirement for graduation. Information of all colors and shades on practically anything is accessible on the internet today. Unselective or improper use of this invaluable resource can however lead to distortion of facts and misinformation unless sources are critically reviewed and declared for verification. It is increasingly common to read of scandals of plagiarism where paragraphs or sentences in publications have been misappropriated (copied from others without quotation marks) or sources have not been acknowledged (2). The risk of plagiarism is a growing concern and challenge that the Ethiopian Journal of Health Development is facing (see notice at the last page of this issue).

Among the many definitions given to plagiarism include: stealing and passing off the ideas, theories or concepts of another as one's own;

presenting someone else's findings, reports or data without crediting source; claiming other people's original ideas as one's own, committing literacy theft; presenting as new and original an idea or product delivered from an existing source. More specifically, it is deliberately using someone else's language, ideas, or other original (not common-knowledge) material without acknowledging its source (3). The spectrum of plagiarism ranges from an all out or significant copying to repetition of own work, duplication of previous publication, incorporation of significant portion of the work of others, cut and paste of different sources put together and hybridized, copying sentences without quotation marks, changing of forms without altering content and providing inaccurate sources that are unrelated and unaccounted for in substance (4).

Plagiarism can have serious consequences to those who are caught in the act. It has become a brand for pseudo-researchers who lack basic ethical principles in the conduct of research. It severely undermines the integrity of the authors involved. Individuals have been reprimanded, denied promotions, expelled from academia and professional associations, removed from academia and professional associations, removed from positions, rewards and achievements retracted and dishonored in public and among professionals (5).

Science is based on trust and research is the pursuit of truth. Plagiarism leads to confusion and damages public confidence in scientific reports. It is an antithesis to those who take

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pains to be accurate in their won findings and are eager to recognize progress made by their colleagues in the common endeavor to learn more and further. It is driven by the wrong motives and should have no place in research. Plagiarism is self-deception and disloyalty to self at the personal level. It has a tendency to repeat itself unless exposed in time and is therefore of concern to institutions. It is of particular importance for journals such as the *EJHD* because it attacks the very core of the mission of sharing credible new knowledge to the public. It is becoming an awesome task to ensure that not plagiarized material escapes the attention of the Board. Plagiarism has to be tackled, discouraged and whenever it occurs, earnestly denounced. The introduction of a plagiarism check software or detection tools by *EJHD* would be helpful in this regard. The best way of preventing it, however, is by combating it in all its forms at all levels. This is particularly important for universities and higher education centers where students are familiarized with the concepts of academic integrity and research ethics. Students must have significant coverage of plagiarism in their ethics courses. The committees and units reviewing scientific proposals should pay attention to risks of plagiarism. It is important to institutionalize policies against plagiarism in research institutions and practice critical reviews of publications through regular journal clubs to cultivate competence in quality review of the scientific literature. Zero tolerance to plagiarism will contribute to nurturing creativity, self-confidence and innovation in science and technology (2, 6, 7).

EJHD relies on the integrity of its authors, the scientific competence and diligence of its distinguished reviewers and the active oversight

of its editorial board members to protect its readers from plagiarized materials or articles. The Journal invites its readers to report on plagiarized materials where there is adequate evidence and its will continue to retract these as soon as confirmed as well as block its authors from future submissions to the journal with public exposure of the decision.

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