Publication ethics trends

Dr Elizabeth Wager
Publications Consultant, Sideview, UK
Former Chair, Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) (2009-12)
Fellow, UK EQUATOR Network Centre
www.lizwager.com @sideviewliz

Research ethics

Narrow view
- Fabrication
- Falsification
- Plagiarism
- Unethical research

Broader view
- Questionable practices
- Publication bias
- Authorship problems

Really broad view

- Replicability
- Data sharing
- Trial registration
- Reporting quality

Shift from
Research misconduct → Research integrity

Publication ethics

Old focus
- Author misconduct
- Reviewer misconduct
- Editor misconduct

New focus
- Business ethics
- Publishing models
- Academic incentives

Editors (supported by publishers) still need to:

- Prevent misconduct / promote good practice (e.g. by having clear instructions)
- Detect misconduct (e.g. screening for plagiarism)
- Respond to suspected misconduct (e.g. call for investigation)
- Retract proven misconduct

Editor-centric view → Author and reader-centric view
Also need to respond to new types of misconduct:

- ‘Fake’ peer review (authors reviewing own work)
- Image manipulation

More focus on business

- Questions about publishers’ profits
- Discussion about business models
- Concern about predatory publishers

Discussion about causes

- Academic reward systems (& use of metrics)
- Problems with Impact Factors (response, eg DORA)
- Role of institutions (data storage, repositories, OA policies)
- Role of funders (OA policies, trial registration, publication bias)

Growing recognition

- Poorly done research is unethical
- Lack of replicability
- Concern about waste in research

Growing recognition

- Poorly reported (or unreported) research is unethical
  (especially in medicine)
Maybe “publishing ethics” / business ethics is a spectrum?

Non-profit “Reasonable” profits “Excessive” profits

Full OA Hybrid OA Pay wall

How do you define a predatory journal?

Transparent info e.g. APC Confusing info e.g. APC Misleading info e.g. APC
Rigorous peer review Light peer review No peer review

High investment in copy editing / quality control Modest investment in copy editing / quality control No copy editing / quality control
Appropriate marketing Inappropriate marketing / spam

How to balance?

Needs / desires
Readers Quality of review Selectivity Open Access Copy editing / quality control
Authors Speed of review Prestige Low / no APC
Peer reviewers Ease of review High acceptance
Journal owners

Conclusions

• Publication ethics isn’t only about author misconduct (although that is still important)
• Publication ethics now includes publishing business ethics
• How much should journals invest in screening / training / quality control?
• Need to consider the role of journals / publishers in the publication ‘ecosystem’