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## Special Editor

**Liviu Warter, Ph.D.**

Center for Socio-Economic Studies and Multiculturalism, Iasi, Romania

E-mail: liviu@warter.ro

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## INSIGHTS INTO PLAGIARISM

Bianca Hanganu

Assistant Professor, MD, PhD Student, “Grigore T. Popa” University of Medicine and Pharmacy, Iasi, Romania

E-mail: bianca\_h\_no1@yahoo.com

Beatrice Gabriela Ioan

Professor, MD, PhD, “Grigore T. Popa” University of Medicine and Pharmacy, Iasi, Romania

E-mail: ioanbml@yahoo.com

### Abstract

Plagiarism is one of the most serious misconduct in scientific research which has a far-reaching negative impact on the scientific community, including the way it is seen and evaluated by society in general. In this paper the authors define plagiarism and analyze its characteristics. They also analyze the reasons behind the plagiarism as well as its consequences both at individual and at society level. The authors conclude that irrespective of the motivation of committing plagiarism, the desire to be a researcher must be accompanied by the assumption of all the responsibilities and respecting all the rules, as well as the assimilation of the necessary knowledge about good practice in research.

**Key words:** plagiarism, research, characteristics, motivation, consequences

### Introduction

Good practice in research may be shaded by misconduct, from the simplest and relatively harmless to the most serious. Their dynamics has been increasing in recent years, the misconduct in research representing in the same time an issue that relates to the whole of society (Garcia-Romero & Estrada-Lorenzo, 2014). Some of the most important deviations in research are plagiarism, fabrication and falsification of the data (Helgesson & Eriksson, 2015).

Literature data places the first use in English of the word “plagiarism” during the English Renaissance, when dramatist and poet Ben Jonson used this term to characterize the state of guilt after literary theft (Mohammed et al., 2015). Historians, however, point out that this practice *per se* dates long before and is found in almost all the specialties of science (Mohammed et al., 2015). For example, for Astronomy, literature states that some of the theories and models that Nicholas Copernicus presented as his own do not actually belong to him, being taken from the Arabic literature, more exactly from Ibn-Elshatir's Book (Mohammed et al., 2015).

Plagiarism is a relevant part of the total number of deviations from good practice in research (Helgesson & Eriksson, 2015; Carnero et al., 2017) and, at the same time, the reason why a significant part of the total number of articles is denied from being published or the reason for which they are withdrawn after publication (Debnath, 2016). Fang, Steen and Casadevall (2012) analyzed the PubMed database in May 2012 in order to identify the withdrawn articles and their result shows that 9.8% of the 2047 articles identified were due to plagiarism.

### Definitions and characteristics

Plagiarism refers, on the one hand, to the takeover of the intellectual product of a person (deliberately and unfairly), and on the other hand, the acquisition of the merits without giving proper credit to the original owner (COSEPUP, 2009; Helgesson & Eriksson, 2015; Orešković & Debrovner, 2016). These actions are defined by some authors as “cheating and theft” (Koul, Clariana, Jitgarun & Singsriwittaya, 2009; Jereb et al., 2018), all the more so as to obtain a benefit regardless of its material form or not (Fishman, 2009).

By practicing plagiarism, it is being touched the intellectual property, which sums up ideas, data (Bebeau, 1995), “processes, methods, results and words of another person” (COSEPUP, 2009; Helgesson & Eriksson, 2015; Orešković & Debrovner, 2016), regardless of the form in which they appear (Helgesson & Eriksson, 2015). From the point of view of the type of unfairly assumed intellectual product, plagiarism can be harder or easier to detect and/or demonstrate (e.g. assuming the ideas presented at conferences or expressed verbally *vs.* assuming the results found in materials that are already published) (Helgesson & Eriksson, 2015; Debnath, 2016).

In-depth analysis of the subject shows that the practice of plagiarism ranges from the use of a person’s ideas in an article to the full use of another’s article, the highest temptation being the translation from another language (COPE, 1999). Regarding the ideas, it does not matter whether or not they have been published (COPE, 1999), since information can also be taken from a course or seminar material, for example (Helgesson & Eriksson, 2015).

Even though researchers can involve in plagiarism at any moment in their career, this practice is more commonly reported at the beginning of their activity in research (Martinson, Anderson & de Vries, 2005).

Nevertheless, not only researchers are “predisposed” to engage in such reprehensible practices. A study on student activity to engage in plagiarism shows that this practice is more common among boys compared to girls, more often at the beginning of their studies and more frequently among students with lower learning outcomes (Newstead, Franklyn-Stokes & Armstead, 1996)

### **Types of plagiarism**

Plagiarism can occur in several forms.

In the peer-review process, the person who analyzes a manuscript can take the ideas identified in the analyzed material, using them to produce materials that will be published in their own name ([http://ccnmtl.columbia.edu/projects/rcr/rcr\\_authorship/foundation/index.html#1](http://ccnmtl.columbia.edu/projects/rcr/rcr_authorship/foundation/index.html#1)). Similarly, plagiarism can also be committed in the grant proposal appraisal process, when the reviewer sub-evaluates the project in order not to receive funding, takes the idea into his own grant proposal and sends it for evaluation to another funding agency. Another example is related to the guidance of the dissertation work of the students, when the coordinating professors write articles using data collected by students, but without giving them the appropriate credit ([http://ccnmtl.columbia.edu/projects/rcr/rcr\\_authorship/foundation/index.html#1](http://ccnmtl.columbia.edu/projects/rcr/rcr_authorship/foundation/index.html#1))

Likewise, plagiarism covers the following actions:

- lack of quotes when taking quotations from materials published or not (<http://www.plagiarism.org/article/what-is-plagiarism>; Bebeau, 1995);
- modifying words in a sentence while retaining its structure, but without referring to the source (<http://www.plagiarism.org/article/what-is-plagiarism>);
- the use of figures or tables without permission of the copyright owner (Bebeau, 1995);
- copying from one or more sources, without quoting or quoting them, so that the resulting material lacks originality; sometimes the sources are wrongly cited to avoid detection of plagiarism (Debnath, 2016; <http://www.plagiarism.org/article/what-is-plagiarism>).

- the direct use of the cited sources in other published materials without consulting the original material quoted (Bebeau, 1995);

In the “mosaic” plagiarism, several sources are used which contain the same idea, and some words are taken from each, possibly removing or adding words or synonyms without quoting sources (Das & Panjabi, 2011).

Another form of plagiarism is inappropriate paraphrasing or failure to paraphrase. This happens when an author “borrows” parts of various materials and makes only minor changes, such as changing the words, the order of words, the tense, etc ([https://ori.hhs.gov/education/products/roig\\_st\\_johns/Inappropriate%20paraphrasing.html](https://ori.hhs.gov/education/products/roig_st_johns/Inappropriate%20paraphrasing.html)).

Some authors also consider that honorary authorship and ghost-writing bring with them a plagiarism component, since these two deviations from good practice presume getting merit based on the work done by others, even if the latter do not have any objection (Anekwe, 2010)

A particular form is self-plagiarism, which, like plagiarism, is not ethically accepted, in both cases being about unfairly obtaining credit for a certain research (Heglesson & Eriksson, 2015). In this case, the author uses his own previously published work in a new material, but without quoting the source. Sometimes it can be considered unintentional or impossible to avoid, since the same idea cannot be formulated in a variety of forms, especially in the “Material and methods” section (Orešković & Debrovner, 2016). This practice is quite common, one of the main reasons for which it is used (when it is intended) being the numerical growth of publications (Merlo, Vahakangas & Knudsen, 2008).

### **Issues regarding the motivation to commit plagiarism**

The reasons that motivate researchers to commit deviations from good conduct in research vary on the one hand with the degree of development of the country from which the researcher comes (Davis, 2003) and on the other hand with the degree of pressure to promote in a particular hierarchical position (Debnath, 2016).

Thus, the reasons for plagiarism range from the most simple, unintentional, to the most serious, when the aim is to achieve certain goals, the existence or not of intention being an important element in the analysis and sanctioning of the detected cases (Helgesson & Eriksson, 2015).

In developing countries, engaging in plagiarism is closely related to education, by the lack of training for researchers regarding the rules of responsible conduct of research, or lack of training to acquire the appropriate writing skills. To these are added the lack of specific institutional policies, the absence of sanctioning measures and the increased degree of permissiveness, as well as the absence of strategies for the supervision of academic institutions and journals and, last but not least, the existence of corruption (Carnero et al., 2017).

On the other hand, some forms of plagiarism arise from the lack of interest in the realization of a good quality work by: negligence in taking notes and transcribing them; lack of attention to reviewing notes; typing mistakes, etc. (Bebeau, 1995) or as a result of a desire for productivity or work in stress conditions to achieve a target (Debnath, 2016), preferring to finish the material in a shorter time, so that greater importance is given to the quantity in relation to quality of the resulted material (Bebeau, 1995). Likewise, another temptation is related to the availability and easy accessibility of information via the Internet (Debnath, 2016; Jereb et al., 2018).

Plagiarism can also arise from the neglect or ignorance of the conventions of science that define clear writing rules (e.g. in case of plagiarism- respecting intellectual property) or cultural differences that may influence the perception of these conventions or the values they promote (Bebeau, 1995).

In the case of students, plagiarism is often the result of lacking knowledge of the rules. Jereb et al. (2018) remark in their study that students commit plagiarism on the one hand unintentionally because they do not know the rules of good practice in research or the limits on plagiarism, what does it mean paraphrasing, citation, etc. or how to avoid committing such deviations from good practice in research. These elements increase the risk that after the completion of the studies, those persons will continue to engage in such practices. On the other hand, an important element for which students engage in plagiarism is technology evolution and easy access to information, the easy use of information they find (e.g. copy and paste, online translations), with the temptation to finish a material as quickly as possible (Koul et al., 2009), to obtain a higher score (Park, 2003). As the pressure to publish as many articles as possible leads researchers to engage in plagiarism (George, 2016), the pressure for as many high scores as possible (both because of peer competition and family pressure) determine students to engage in such practices (Ramzan, Munir, Siddique & Asif, 2012).

The results of the study by Garcia-Romero and Estrada-Lorenzo (2014) show that most articles containing plagiarized material are published in lower-listed and less cited journals either because the prestigious journals do not accept them due to their doubtful quality, or the authors intentionally target less-known journals to hide as much as possible the plagiarism.

### **Consequences**

When a researcher is recognized for his work and is given credit for his achievements, thus respecting his intellectual property, benefits both for the researcher (who may benefit, for example, from career advancement) and the scientific community in general, by maintaining integrity (Bebeau, 1995; <http://www.plagiarism.org/plagiarism-research>).

On the other hand, the violation of intellectual property through plagiarism (and also deviations from good practice in research in general) leads to negative consequences, which affect both the researcher who commits plagiarism and the researcher whose work is plagiarized, their families, the scientific community and society in general. Thus, the original author, on the one hand, is wrongly deprived of his own good, even if it does not result in concrete material prejudices (Bebeau, 1995). On the other hand, engaging in an investigation that associates his name with a scandal, even as a victim, can damage his reputation (Bebeau, 1995).

Society may suffer from the negative example given to young people, whether they are at the beginning of their careers or think about choosing the path of research for their future. On the one hand, they could be discouraged, losing confidence in science, and on the other hand they could take over from their older colleagues, creating a vicious circle.

The scientific community can be affected in a number of ways: by misleading the person with the merits of the work he has done to carry out the research or to publish his results; by giving the chance to be promoted in academic careers or to obtain funds for research to the person who does not deserve them; by creating serious problems in performing meta-analyses when results are plagiarized by taking into consideration articles that do not actually bring new results (Helgesson & Eriksson, 2015). Also, by practicing plagiarism (but also in the case of deviations from good practice in research in general), funding for research projects may suffer, as funding agencies will lose confidence in the way research is conducted (Bebeau, 1995). Last but not least, the scientific community will be affected by the distrust of the population in it (Helgesson & Eriksson, 2015; Bebeau, 1995) by the public disclosure of these practices (Martinson et al., 2005; Bonnell et al., 2012).

In assessing the severity of plagiarism, several elements are taken into account, such as: the value of the "product" appropriated, how the plagiarism is achieved, the harm to the

person whose work is plagiarized, the personal gain of the person who commits plagiarism, committing plagiarism with or without intent (Helgesson & Eriksson, 2015).

Over time, various professional bodies have sought to help researchers by protecting their intellectual property by elaborating protocols and rules for writing the scientific articles (Bebeau, 1995). As new methods of breaching the rules of good conduct in research appear, these documents are periodically revised and updated (Helgesson & Eriksson 2015).

Romanian legislation considers plagiarism as “a serious deviation from good conduct in scientific research and academic activity” (Law 1/2011, art 310). Such cases are analyzed at the institutional level by the ethics committees. The appeals are analyzed by the National Ethics Council, the latter having the possibility to analyze a case following the self-referral (Law 206/2004; Law 1/2011).

The sanctions that can be applied by the Institutional Ethics Commissions and the National Ethics Council vary, depending on the severity of the violation, from the written warning, to the withdrawal and correction of the articles published in violation of the rules of good conduct, the reduction of the salary, the prohibition of advancement on higher career positions, withdrawal of the financing or prohibiting access to sources of public funding, or dismissing the person who committed the offense (Law 206/2004; Law 1/2011).

Apart from the legal rules, plagiarism is also sanctioned by journals in which the articles are published, under publication, or subject to peer-review. Thus, as a result of the discovery of a plagiarism, the journal may take one of the following measures: sending a letter of explanation or reprimand to the authors, rejection of the article to be published, withdrawal of the published article, informing the institution in which the author of the problematic article works or prohibition for the future publication, possibly for a certain period of time, of other articles by the authors responsible for committing plagiarism (COPE, 2011).

## Conclusions

Plagiarism is a serious violation of the rules of good conduct in research and scientific publication, with negative consequences for researchers and the scientific community in general as well as for society as a whole. However, plagiarism is often found not only among researchers but also among students, the reasons for committing it and its gravity varying according to the purpose for which the plagiarized material was used.

Plagiarists harm the intellectual property of the persons from whom they took the information, regardless of the form in which it was revealed by the original authors: ideas, data, results, etc., both written and unwritten, self-plagiarism being also included.

Although often the explanation offered by the authors who commit plagiarism is ignorance, the desire to be a researcher must be accompanied by the assumption of all the responsibilities and respecting all the rules, as well as the assimilation of the necessary knowledge about good practice in research.

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