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Ethical violations and the publication of journal articles



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There is a high demand for publication in the form of scientific articles in reputable journals in the academic world in Indonesia. Research publication in reputable or accredited national journals is required for graduation from tertiary institutions for master level students.^{1,2} Publication in reputable international journals is also a requirement for doctoral-level students graduation.^{1,2} For teaching staff, research publication in the form of peer reviewed journal articles is also a requirement for higher levels in the academic career.³ The increasing demand for scientific publication also reported globally.⁴⁻⁶ Furthermore, various reported reasons for publication include adding work resumes, for job promotion, obtaining funding grants, competition among colleagues or proving supremacy, and even in some universities, the history of publications is used as the criteria for determining dissertation internal and external examiners.^{7,8}

Aside from positive impacts, the need for publications in academic circles results in a number of publication practices that fall into an ethical violation.⁷⁻¹⁰ Publication of quality articles is not easy and requires a comprehensive understanding of not only the substance of the article, but also the ethical aspects that accompany a scientific paper. This negligence often occurs in the academic world, as the result of poor understanding of research ethics of the author, especially among the students.

Many do not realize that the ethical feasibility of a published article has begun since the development of the research proposal, which is when defining the research questions. A series of filter questions of "What we know about this topic? What is new in the planned study? What does the proposed research add to the existing body of knowledge?" will shape a good research question and finally add new information to science. When it does not, the study is unscientific and not ethically feasible.⁷

Further, violations of ethics or research misconduct commonly occur during data collection and management. A researcher may ignore ethical procedures when requesting subject approval and maintaining confidentiality. Other common ethical mistakes are not giving proper respect to the subject, not recognizing other researchers' authorship, not realizing a conflict of interest and even trying to hide it, making multiple publications and plagiarism.¹¹ This negligence often occurs in the

academic world, especially in the students, hence it is mainly discussed among academics although there remains many other potential violations of ethics.

It is undeniable that many students and academic staff feel quite satisfied after publishing their research at a seminar or conference. Nevertheless, studies show that more than 50% of abstracts published in seminars or conferences do not continue to be written as journal articles. These abstracts also considered having no role in the scientific world.¹¹⁻¹³ Even though the abstracts meet quality standards, they are not included as complete reports and not recommended for citation.¹⁴ In addition, abstracts or articles with similar ideas often published repeatedly in various seminars or journals, so it becomes unethical.¹⁴

One issue in the practice of academic publications that is not widely understood by students and lecturers is related to authorship. In a research team, writers often feel they must include all team members as writers (cronyism) even though the fact is that not all contribute to writing the scientific aspects^{15,16} so that the phenomenon of multiple authorship frequently appears.¹⁶⁻¹⁸ There is evidence that multiple authorship can be categorized as an effort to improve the status of co-author, but the fact is that not all co-authors help in the completion of the article.¹⁹ One study even reported the existence of well-known, senior-level writers who wrote more than one paper in 10 days,¹⁸ which the feasibility is questioned. Another reported issue related to the authorship is a situation where the co-author is willing to provide funding, even if it does not contribute scientifically so that the article can be published.⁵

In the academic world, students are groups who are often in a weak position and experience unfair treatment when dealing with their lecturers or professors who may have provided funds and facilities when students conduct studies.^{20,21} There are some time when the lecturer or professor wishes to be the primary writer even though it is not feasible²⁰ and when students are required to enter the names of other people who do not contribute scientifically but rather to positions in the organization.¹⁵ Conversely, students often write their articles and then enter the name of the supervisor or professor who provides study funding as a co-author

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(honorary authorship) as a form of appreciation even though the supervisor has no role in writing the article.^{15,21,22}

Students are limited in academic time, while lecturers need scientific articles because career advancement is ideally also limited by time. Those cause the shorter time for publication and the best access to journals to be an essential aspect to meet their timeline. There is an unmet need where quality journals usually try to help writers improve their articles through peer review, selection, provide visibility and ongoing access for writers, so the process takes a long time,^{8,23} and results in discrepancies with the author's timeline. This opportunity is captured by predatory journals that offer easy and inexpensive access, peer-reviewed, and indexed internationally with false metrics such as impact factors and journals citation report.²³ There is evidence that writers unexpectedly publish articles in predatory journals because of their lack of experiences.^{4,24} However, they are also possibly deliberate even though there have never been published studies.

Since the academic world is the most related to ethical violations above, have all the stakeholders involved in it taken their respective roles? Does the student's supervisor understand ethics and provide guidance to publish student's research following ethical principles? As a thesis examiner, have these ethical aspects been raised in the student proposal exam? Has the lecturer or researcher done the research and published it according to ethical principles? As a lecturer of research methods, have they provided enough ethical provisions to students? As an official, for example as the head of study programs, deans and chancellors, have they provided adequate space and systems for conducting ethical research? As a journal manager, have the information on the ethical boundaries been disseminated for prospective writers? Every person can take a role to reduce the occurrence of ethical violations and make small changes that will become cumulatively meaningful.

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