

## **What Is Plagiarism and How Much Authors Know About It?**

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Journal of Pakistan Medical Association (JPMA) is a monthly medical journal published from Karachi, Pakistan. The annual submission rate is approximately 600 manuscripts. To ensure quality-assurance JPMA follows a strict plagiarism policy in accordance with Committee on Publication Ethics (UK) guidelines. This study was performed to assess the level of perception and practices regarding plagiarism of authors submitting to JPMA.

This cross sectional study was conducted in late 2010 at JPMA editorial office. A calculated sample of 247 was approached and later a weekly reminder was sent to non-responders. Included participants were corresponding authors of original studies who submitted in the first quarter of 2009 and the three quarters of 2010.

Data collection was done through electronic mail with a pre-tested questionnaire. The participants' provided their demographic information and experience of publishing. Perception of the topic was enquired through categorical questions. Practices were checked by enquiring ways the authors referred articles. Data was analyzed through SPSSv.16 and the outcomes were assessed by assigning scores to each of the 32 items of the questionnaire. Each correct answer was given a weightage of one, resulting in a cumulative score of 16 for all sets of questions. Descriptive and Inferential statistics were calculated with 95% CI. To specify the level of having adequate information, 75% percentile of the scoring was considered as a cut off.

### *Findings:*

Of 110 respondents, 102 were used for analysis after data management. Response rate was 45%. Mean age of the participants was 38±10

years. Majority were males 58(57%). At the time of submission, 88(86%) were affiliated with a teaching institute, remaining were either resident-writers or working in a non-teaching hospital. The number of publications quoted were less than 5 by 44(43%) and more than 70 by 4(4%) with the others being in between.

Objective questions on the perception of plagiarism were answered correctly by 22(22%) participants, whereas 62(61%) agreed that they had adequate subjective knowledge of the topic. Self-plagiarism was correctly defined by 36(35%) and 10(10%) had accurate concept of collusion. Knowledge on plagiarism detecting tools received 50(49%) positive answers but only 17(34%) could correctly name such tools. Penalties of plagiarism were known to 9(9%) with others knowing some and 5(5%) knew none.

Regarding practices of refereeing, 47(46%) replied correctly and 3(3%) could not answer to any correct option. Using references for internet based source, 31(30%) had right answers while 14(14%) were wrong. Referencing for paraphrased material was correctly answered by 18(18%) and 24(24%) were wrong. Ethical practices related to manuscript submission, especially Duplicate Submission, was considered wrong by 95(93%) and Salami Slicing was discouraged by 81(79%). Plagiarism policies of any journal were read by 50(49%) participants.

After assigning weightage to each variable, scores were calculated. Only 32(31%) were able to secure above the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile; that is 11 out of total 16.

The study concluded that the authors submitting to JPMA did not have adequate knowledge of plagiarism. This can be attributed to lack of training and should be addressed appropriately as it is an integral part of scientific misconduct.

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