

## Report

# Research and Publishing Ethics among Iranian Researchers: The Realities

Amin Talebi Bezmin Abadi, MD<sup>1</sup>; Yeong Yeh Lee, MD<sup>2</sup><sup>1</sup>Department of Bacteriology, Faculty of Medical Sciences, Tarbiat Modares University, Tehran, Iran<sup>2</sup>School of Medical Sciences, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Kubang Kerian, Kelantan, Malaysia

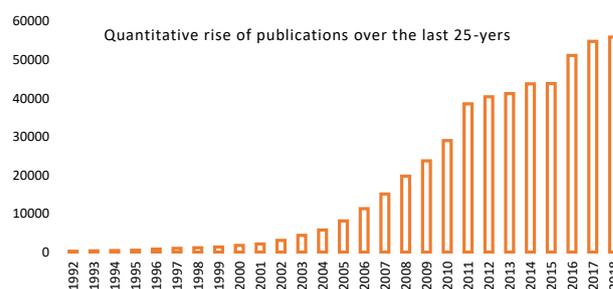
Received: December 29, 2018, Accepted: February 13, 2019, ePublished: April 1, 2019

Concerning an interesting paper by Didari and Abdollahi entitled, “Ethical Priority Setting for Successful Publishing by Iranian Scientists”.<sup>1</sup> The authors seemed to paint a bleak picture of the recent Iranian research atmosphere.<sup>2</sup> There are some additional points to be considered before deriving such a conclusion.

- In the opinion of Didari and Abdollahi, “...high-rank medical practitioners and administrators are also likely to commit fraud in research. Their numerous clinical and executive duties leave little or no time and energy for precise research activities, which are mandatory for academic promotion”, but this was unfortunately written without any support by evidence or reliable references.<sup>1</sup> To date, none of the above mentioned individuals have any published papers that are retracted due to unethical behaviors (See retraction watch database using author search (<http://retractiondatabase.org/RetractionSearch.aspx?&AspxAutoDetectCookieSupport=1>)).
- Didari and Abdollahi pointed out that imposed sanctions on Iran partly gave rise to the emergence of frauds and problems in scientific publishing. Since around 1978, it has been more than 40 years that Iranian scientists were being challenged from non-stop sanctions, and we agree that despite the sanctions, based on our own data, the number of publications are increasing year after year (Figure 1) and so are the number of retracted publications (Figure 2). How do we explain this observation? We searched the retraction watch database, and we found there were few questionable types of fraud publications there. Based on our analysis, the two main reasons for retractions of Iranian papers were due to fake reviews and duplication/falsification (Figures 3).

So, why despite the sanction, there are more submitted papers? And how sanctions led to increased duplication/falsification by Iranian researchers? These are not easily answered questions. Didari and Abdollahi opined that

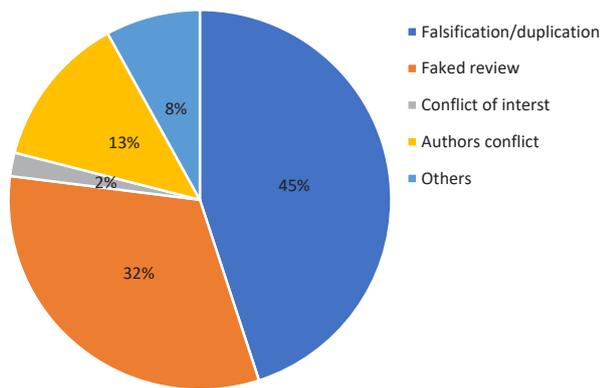
sanctions stopped imports of high-tech research equipment into the country and this hampers better research and leaves novel publications to chance.<sup>2</sup> In reality, none of the retracted papers by Iranians were published in high-rank journals. The best impact factor (IF) of journals that retracted Iranian papers was not more than three. Faked-review is a relatively newly identified publishing phenomenon that requires urgent input by authorities to better manage it. It is unfortunate that many researchers and



**Figure 1.** Increasing Trend of Publications by Iranian Scientists in the Last 25 Years Based on Scientometric Analysis From the Scopus database.



**Figure 2.** Increasing Trend of Publications by Iranian Scientists in the Last 25 Years Based on Scientometric Analysis From the Scopus database.



**Figure 3.** Significant Percentages of Falsified and Faked Review Papers Retracted in Recent Years.

students may be unaware of such unconscious plagiaristic acts and other scientific misconducts. There should be an international committee on ethics and research integrity as a global watch dog to address this emerging issue. In addition, there should be urgent reviews in institutional policies in the screening of new faculty members and

academic promotion. To conclude, we are of the opinion that addressing ethics should be the first step in ensuring transparency in scientific publishing, especially among research and publishing stakeholders in Iran.

#### Authors' Contribution

ATBA and YYL equally contributed to writing and finalizing the manuscript.

#### Conflict of Interest Disclosures

The authors have no conflicts of interest.

#### Ethical Statement

Not applicable.

#### References

1. Tina Didari MA. Ethical Priority Setting for Successful Publishing by Iranian Scientists J Korean Med Sci. 2018;33(49):e313. doi: 10.3346/jkms.2018.33.e313.
2. V. S. Elsevier retracting 26 papers accepted because of fake reviews. Available from: <https://retractionwatch.com/2017/12/21/elsevier-retracting-26-papers-accepted-fake-reviews>. Updated 2017. Accessed December 21, 2017.

**Cite this article as:** Talebi Bezmin Abadi A, Lee YY. Research and publishing ethics among Iranian researchers: the realities. Arch Iran Med. 2019;22(4):211–212.

© 2019 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.