

PERCEPTION AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS RESEARCH MISCONDUCT: A SURVEY IN YOUNG BIOMEDICAL RESEARCHERS IN ITALY

Marco Cosentino, Mario Picozzi, Franca Marino

Abstract:

Worldwide concern is growing about the irreproducibility of a high number of published findings, in particular in biomedical sciences, likely due to misconduct as well as to questionable research practices. In Italy no guidelines exist on research misconduct. To assess perception and attitudes towards misconduct, a Scientific Misconduct Questionnaire was submitted to young researchers attending a course on methodology, ethics and integrity of biomedical research at the University of Insubria (Varese, I) during November 2014.

Overall, 38 researchers filled the questionnaire (79% females, 76% PhD students, 68% with at least one publication). 21% were aware of misconduct in workplace. Respondents rated occasional/frequent: occurrences of plagiarism (26%), data falsification (37%), selective dropping of data from "outlier" cases (32%). Overall, 29 respondents (76%) were concerned about misconduct and 8 (21%) said they did not know. Effectiveness of existing rules for reducing misconduct was rated low by 42% and high by 40%. Severity of penalties for misconduct was deemed low by 53% and high by 29%. Nearly all (95%) agreed about the need for training on research methodology and ethics. In summary, most of the young researchers perceived misconduct as a frequent occurrence in their workplace and ask for training. Research institutions have a crucial duty for ensuring research integrity and should include specific training for PhD students as well as for postdoc researchers.

Key words: scientific misconduct; questionable research practice; perception and attitudes; young researchers; institutions

Authors

Marco Cosentino (marco.cosentino@uninsubria.it), Mario Picozzi, Franca Marino, University of Insubria, Via Valleggio, 11, Como CO, Italy