
Legal Research Methodology: Research Ethics and Unethical Practices in Authorship and Publication

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Abstract: *Ethics is a branch of philosophy known as moral philosophy, which deals with what is right and wrong. It entails knowing what is right or wrong and doing what is right. In relation to research, ethics refers to a code of what is morally and legally right or wrong in the conduct of research. It is a system of moral rules for conducting research and reporting research results. It is simply a moral code for the responsible conduct of research. However, there are many unethical practices in authorship and publication by individuals, groups and institutions. The aim of this paper is to examine unethical practices in authorship and publication. In particular, it examines the concept of research ethics and some important codes of ethics in research. It also examines some core ethical principles in research. It further examines research misconduct including plagiarism and unethical practices in authorship and publication. It suggests training for all the stakeholders in the research community including students, supervisors, authors and professional writers.*

Keywords: authorship, research ethics, plagiarism, research integrity, research misconduct, unethical practices

INTRODUCTION

Ethics is derived from the Greek word *ethos*, which means habit, custom, character or morals.¹ It is a branch of philosophy known as moral philosophy, which deals with what is right and wrong. It entails knowing what is right or wrong and doing what is right. In relation to research, ethics refers to a code of what is morally and legally right or wrong in the conduct of research. It is a system of moral rules for conducting research and reporting research results. It is simply a moral code for the responsible conduct of research.²

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¹ AS Warsy and IA Warsy, 'Publish Ethically or Perish' [2019] *Journal of Nature and Science of Medicine* 186, 187.

² N Husain, 'Research Ethics: A Path to Making Responsible Conduct of Research' [2020] 14(4) *Journal of Xidian University* 194, 196.

However, there are many unethical practices in authorship and publication by individuals, groups and institutions. The aim of this paper is to examine research ethics and unethical practices in authorship and publication. In particular, it examines the concept of research ethics and some important codes of ethics in research. It also examines some core ethical principles in research. It further examines research misconduct including plagiarism and unethical practices in authorship and publication. It suggests ethics training programmes for all the stakeholders in the research community including students, supervisors, authors and professional writers.

Code of Ethics in Research

There are many codes of ethics in research and general professional conduct. **Professional ethics** is a set of ethical standards adopted by a professional group for the conduct of their professional careers. Thus, professional ethics formulates administrative, legal and ethical standards which are known as codes of ethics.³ The aim is to promote good practices, maintain public trust and professional integrity as well as protect the interests of clients and society.⁴

For example, the Rules of Professional Conduct for Legal Practitioners 2023 enjoin lawyers to be honest, truthful, candid and fair in their dealings with clients, colleagues and the court. They must continually update their knowledge, skills and competence through mandatory continuing legal education. They must avoid any form of conflict of interest, deceit, fraud or misrepresentation. Such unethical practices could undermine the credibility of the entire legal system.⁵

The Golden Rule ('Do unto others as you would have them do unto you')⁶ is a fundamental ethical code enjoining people of all works to treat others with the same kindness, respect and compassion they desire for themselves. The Hippocratic Oath ('To help or at least do no harm') is another fundamental ethical code attributed to the Greek physician, Hippocrates, adopted as a guide to conduct by the medical profession throughout the ages and still used in the graduation ceremonies of many medical schools. In the oath, the physician pledges to prescribe only beneficial treatments, according to his abilities and judgement; to refrain from causing harm or hurt; and to live an exemplary personal and professional life.⁷ It prioritizes patient well-being, 'to help, or at least to do no harm,' encapsulating the contemporary ethical principles of 'beneficence' and 'non-maleficence.'⁸

³ University of Kashmir, 'Professional Ethics' <<https://www.usic.uok.edu.in>> accessed 9 May 2026.

⁴ See generally CP Verma and V Sharma, 'Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct' [2021] 3(12) *International Journal of Advances in Engineering and Management* 347-355.

⁵ Jingwei Xu and Zhengmin Li and Siyu Li, 'Legal Ethics and Professional Responsibility in the Legal Profession' (SHS Web of Conferences 2024) 1.

⁶ Matthew 7:12; Luke 6:31 KJV.

⁷ Encyclopaedia Britannica, 'Hippocratic Oath: Ethical Code' <<https://www.britannica.com>> accessed 8 May 2026.

⁸ H Askitopoulou, 'The Hippocratic Principle 'to help or at least to do no harm' [2024] 31(3) *Transfusion Clinique et Biologique* 174-180.

In the same vein, **research ethics** is applied ethics grounded on common morality and addressed to all people involved in research. It refers to ethical conduct in the process of research and the protection of the human rights of research participants. It provides guidelines for the responsible conduct of research.⁹

However, the first international effort to codify research ethics is the Nuremberg Code of 1947. It was designed to address the callous abuse and murder of human beings in the name of medical research during World War II. Victims were placed in low-pressure chambers that simulated high altitudes or in vats of chilled seawater to see how long it would take them to die. Many of those who survived were killed so that autopsies could be performed. Sections of bone and entire limbs were removed from healthy inmates and then transplanted into other victims.¹⁰

A total of 23 doctors were tried for crimes against humanity following the atrocious experiments they conducted on groups of unwilling war prisoners. 16 were found guilty out of which 7 received death sentences while others had jail terms ranging from 10 years to life imprisonment. The remaining 7 were acquitted. During the trial, popularly known as the **Doctors' Trial**, the defence argued that the Nazi experiments had been no worse than medical research elsewhere. The court rulings led to the establishment of the Nuremberg Code, which consists of ten ethical principles meant to prevent future abuse of human participants in research.¹¹

The Code asserts emphatically that in all research involving human beings, 'The voluntary consent of the human subject is absolutely essential.' This means that the person involved should have legal capacity to give consent; should be so situated as to be able to exercise free power of choice, without the intervention of any element of force, fraud, deceit, duress, overreaching, or other ulterior form of constraints or coercion; and should have sufficient knowledge and comprehension of the elements of the subject matter involved as to enable him to make an understanding and enlightened decision.¹²

The elements of 'knowledge and comprehension' require that before acceptance of an affirmative decision, there should be made known to the participant the nature, duration and purpose of the experiment; the method and means by which it is to be conducted; all inconveniences and hazards reasonably to be expected; and the effects upon his health or person which may possibly come from his participation in the experiment.¹³ The Code is based on the principle of *volenti non fit*

⁹ N Husain, 'Research Ethics: A Path to Making Responsible Conduct of Research' [2020] 14(4) *Journal of Xidian University* 194, 196.

¹⁰ Vivien Spitz, 'Doctors from Hell: The Horrific Account of Nazi Experiments on Humans' [2005] 353(11) *New England Journal of Medicine* 1187-1188.

¹¹ V Kopjar, 'An Overview of the Nuremberg Code, Declaration of Helsinki and Belmont Report in the Context of Promoting Ethical Global Clinical Trial Conduct' [2021] 6(4) *Journal of Clinical Research* 1; BA Fischer IV, 'A Summary of Important Documents in the Field of Research Ethics' [2006] 32(1) *Schizophrenia Bulletin* 69.

¹² Evelyne Shuster, 'Fifty Years Later: The Significance of the Nuremberg Code' [1997] 337(20) *New England Journal of Medicine* 1436.

¹³ *Ibid* 1436.

injuria, which means ‘no injury is done to him who consents’ or, put differently, ‘a volunteer cannot complain.’¹⁴

The Nuremberg Code has not been adopted in its entirety by any international organization to have any binding force. However, its basic requirement of informed consent has been universally accepted and articulated in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights 1966.¹⁵ It is also the basis of the International Ethical Guidelines for Biomedical Research Involving Human Subjects 1993, adopted by the World Health Organization and the Council of International Organizations of Medical Sciences.¹⁶

The Helsinki Declaration of 1964, titled *Ethical Principles for Medical Research Involving Human Subjects*, was adopted by the World Medical Association Conference held at Helsinki. The Declaration goes a step further to require researchers to use explicit written and documented procedures in requesting and obtaining consent and to seek specific consent to envisaged research project. It declares that, in any research on human beings, each potential subject must be adequately informed of the aims, methods, sources of funding, and any possible conflicts of interest, institutional affiliation of the researcher, the anticipated benefits and potential risks of the study and the discomfort it may entail. The participants should be informed of the right to abstain from participation in the study or to withdraw consent to participate at any time without reprisal.¹⁷

The Belmont Report of 1979 came into existence to address the deplorable acts in research and to protect human subjects in clinical research in the United States especially in response to the Tuskegee Syphilis Study scandal, which demanded more protection for subjects than was afforded by the Nuremberg Code and the Helsinki Declaration.¹⁸ This study was conducted to determine the course of syphilis without consent of the human participants. No informed consent was obtained and the participants, mainly Negro men, were left without treatment and many of them suffered and died.¹⁹

¹⁴ See *Afrab Chem Ltd v Owoduenyi* [2014] LPELR-23613 (CA) 36-37.

¹⁵ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights 1966, art 7.

¹⁶ Council for International Organizations of Medical Sciences, *International Ethical Guidelines for Biomedical Research Involving Human Subjects* (Council for International Organizations of Medical Sciences 1993).

¹⁷ See V Kopjar, ‘An Overview of the Nuremberg Code, Declaration of Helsinki and Belmont Report in the Context of Promoting Ethical Global Clinical Trial Conduct’ [2021] 6(4) *Journal of Clinical Research* 1; BA Fischer IV, ‘A Summary of Important Documents in the Field of Research Ethics’ [2006] 32(1) *Schizophrenia Bulletin* 69.

¹⁸ JM Sims, ‘A Brief Review of the Belmont Report’ [2010] 29(4) *Dimensions of Critical Care Nursing* 173; BG Bigby, ‘Using the Belmont Principles to Create and Sustain [a] Healthy Relationship between Institutional Review Boards and Investigators’ [2009] 23(2) *Monitor* 41-50.

¹⁹ Vickie A Miracle, ‘The Belmont Report: The Triple Crown of Research Ethics’ [2016] 35(4) *Dimensions of Critical Care Nursing* 223, 224.

In 1973, forty of the surviving men filed a class action against the US Government, seeking a total of \$1.8 billion compensation for the survivors and the estates of the deceased men. The suit was settled out of court and the out-of-court settlement amounted to \$10 million.²⁰

The Belmont Report builds upon the Nuremberg Code and the Helsinki Declaration. It has been described as the triple crown of research ethics.²¹ It introduced three ethical principles that serve as the basis for the protection of the human rights of participants in research. These are the principles of beneficence; justice; and respect for persons. It also became the basis for US federal regulation governing the protection of human subjects in research.²²

Core Ethical Principles in Research

Legal research goes beyond merely finding, analyzing, interpreting and applying the law to the facts of a particular case. It also demands integrity, accuracy and responsibility in researching and reporting research results. Ethical considerations ensure that research is credible, fair, and contributes meaningfully to legal discourse.²³

The following are the core ethical principles in research:

- (1) **Honesty and acknowledgement:** Legal research must be original and if the researcher uses the works of others, such works must be properly credited or referenced. Plagiarizing someone else's work, or using his words or ideas without proper acknowledgement, undermines the integrity of the research process. The legal researcher must always cite sources accurately using standard citation formats or referencing styles.²⁴ The two standard referencing styles for legal research in Nigeria are OSCOLA²⁵ and NALT Style of Referencing.²⁶
- (2) **Accuracy and objectivity:** Legal research should be fact-based and unbiased. Thus, any deliberate misinterpretation of statutes, cases and opinions to fit one's personal argument is unethical. The legal researcher must present diverse perspectives and analyze laws in an objective manner.²⁷

²⁰ Yara Simon, 'Tuskegee Syphilis Study: Failing to Treat Black Men for 40 Years' <www.history.howstuffworks.com> accessed 9 May 2026.

²¹ Vickie A Miracle, 'The Belmont Report: The Triple Crown of Research Ethics' [2016] 35(4) *Dimensions of Critical Care Nursing* 223.

²² See BG Bigby, 'Using the Belmont Principles to Create and Sustain [a] Healthy Relationship between Institutional Review Boards and Investigators' [2009] 23(2) *Monitor* 41-50; JM Sims, 'A Brief Review of the Belmont Report' [2010] 29(4) *Dimensions of Critical Care Nursing* 173.

²³ See generally SH Akaranga and BK Makau, 'Ethical Considerations and their Applications to Research: A Case of the University of Nairobi' [2016] 3(12) *Journal of Educational Policy and Entrepreneurial Research* 1-9.

²⁴ *Oketaolegun v State* [2015] All FWLR (Pt. 797) 677, 690 A-C per Galadima JSC.

²⁵ University of Oxford, *Oxford Standard for the Citation of Legal Authorities* (4th edn, Hart Publishing 2012).

²⁶ Nigerian Association of Law Teachers, *NALT Uniform Format and Citation Guide for Legal Research Writing in Nigeria* (NALT 2021).

²⁷ De Facto Law Journal, 'Ethics in Legal Research: What to Keep in Mind' [2025] <<https://www.defactolawjournal.org/>> accessed 20 April 2026.

- (3) **Confidentiality and privacy:** If the research involves court cases, client data or interviews, the legal researcher should respect confidentiality and the right to privacy. He should respect individual rights, especially the right to privacy guaranteed under the Constitution²⁸ and the protection of personal data under the Nigeria Data Protection Act 2023.²⁹ He should not disclose private or privileged information without appropriate permission.³⁰
- (4) **Conflict of interest:** If the research is influenced by external affiliations, funding or personal interest, disclose them to maintain transparency and credibility. Ethical research must remain free from bias and undue influence.³¹
- (5) **Avoidance of data manipulation:** Altering facts, statutes or findings to support one's argument is unethical. The legal researcher must ensure that all references are authentic, properly sourced and verifiable. There should be no manipulation of data or results.³²
- (6) **Voluntary informed consent:** This is the central ethical issue in conducting research involving human participants. If the research is empirical, such as surveys, interviews or field research, the researcher must obtain voluntary informed consent from the participants, which means that 'a person knowingly, voluntarily, and intelligently, and in a clear and manifest way, gives his consent.'³³ In practice, voluntary informed consent includes the following components:
 - (a) A statement that the study involves research; an explanation of the purposes of the study and the expected duration of participation;
 - (b) An in-depth description of the research procedures including any procedures that are experimental;
 - (c) A description of any reasonably foreseeable risks or discomforts to the participants;
 - (d) A description of any potential benefits to the participants or to others that may be reasonably expected from the research;
 - (e) A disclosure of appropriate alternative procedures or courses of treatment, if any, that might be advantageous to the participants;
 - (f) A statement about unforeseeable risks that are not known to the researcher at the time;
 - (g) A statement describing the extent to which confidentiality of records identifying the participant will be maintained;
 - (h) A statement that participation is voluntary and that the participant can withdraw from participation without fear of penalty, reprisal or loss of benefits.³⁴

²⁸ Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999, s 37.

²⁹ Nigeria Data Protection Act 2023, s 2.

³⁰ Ibid, s 40.

³¹ De Facto Law Journal (n 24).

³² KF Olaseinde and RA Adeniji, 'Ethical Issues in Science Research Writing in Nigeria' [2024] 13(7) *International Journal of Innovative Research and Development* 1, 2.

³³ Bernadette Armiger, 'Ethics of Nursing Research: Profile, Principles, Perspective' [1977] 26(5) *Nursing Research* 330, 334.

³⁴ J Sims and VA Miracle, 'Elements of an Informed Consent' [2002] 21(6) *Dimensions of Critical Care Nursing* 242, 243-244; Vickie A Miracle, 'The Belmont Report: The Triple Crown of Research Ethics' [2016] 35(4) *Dimensions of Critical Care Nursing* 223, 226.

- (7) **Beneficence:** The principle of beneficence means, first of all, ‘do no harm’. It also means researchers should make all efforts to maximize the possible benefits of the research and minimize any potential risks to the participants in particular and the society at large.³⁵
- (8) **Justice:** The principle of justice entails fairness in the distribution of who ought to receive the benefits of research and bear its burdens. Researchers should treat the participants fairly and equally.³⁶
- (9) **Respect for persons:** The principle of respect for persons is based on two ethical concepts. The first is the concept of autonomy which allows people to decide for themselves whether they want to participate in a research study, or not to participate in the study, or to withdraw from the study.³⁷ The second is the concept of vulnerability which requires utmost protection for vulnerable populations, such as children, prisoners, students, aged people, critically ill or mentally ill persons.³⁸ These persons require the utmost protection. They also require the same autonomy and respect for persons as all others.³⁹

Research Integrity

The importance of research integrity cannot be overemphasized. The value and benefits of research are vitally dependent on the integrity of research. **Research integrity** is generally understood to mean the performance of research according to the highest standards of professionalism and rigour, in an ethically robust manner.⁴⁰ It is at the very heart of responsible conduct of research. It implies that researchers should take responsibility for the trustworthiness of their research.⁴¹

The principles that are considered to constitute research integrity vary in different contexts and across disciplines. However, the core principles of research integrity include the principles of honesty, reliability, respect and accountability. The World Conference on Research Integrity 2010, in Singapore, defined the core principles of research integrity as follows:

- (1) Honesty in all aspects of research;
- (2) Accountability in the conduct of research;
- (3) Professional courtesy and fairness in working with others; and
- (4) Good stewardship of research on behalf of others.⁴²

Singapore Statement on Research Integrity
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³⁵ JM Sims, ‘A Brief Review of the Belmont Report’ [2010] 29(4) *Dimensions of Critical Care Nursing* 173.

³⁶ Ibid 174.

³⁷ VA Miracle, ‘The Belmont Report: The Triple Crown of Research Ethics’ [2016] 35(4) *Dimensions of Critical Care Nursing* 223, 226.

³⁸ G Fouka and M Mantzorou, ‘What are the Major Ethical Issues in Conducting Research? Is there a Conflict between the Research Ethics and the Nature of Nursing?’ [2011] 5(1) *Health Science Journal* 3, 7.

³⁹ VA Miracle, ‘The Belmont Report: The Triple Crown of Research Ethics’ [2016] 35(4) *Dimensions of Critical Care Nursing* 223, 225.

⁴⁰ Science with and for Society, ‘Research Integrity’ [2018] 4 *Policy Brief* 1.

⁴¹ World Conference on Research Integrity, *Singapore Statement on Research Integrity* (World Conference on Research Integrity 2010).

⁴² Ibid. See also Science with and for Society, ‘Research Integrity’ [2018] 4 *Policy Brief* 1, 2.

PRINCIPLES

Honesty in all aspects of research

Accountability in the conduct of research

Professional courtesy and fairness in working with others

Good stewardship of research on behalf of others

Research Misconduct

Research misconduct means fabrication, falsification or plagiarism in proposing, performing or reviewing research or in reporting research results.⁴³ The operative words are further defined as follows:

- (1) **Fabrication** means making up data or results and recording or reporting them.⁴⁴ This means the researcher actually reported data that did not exist in the first place. It means that the researcher actually invented the data. Both the intent to invent the data and the actual reporting of the non-existence data constitute misconduct.
- (2) **Falsification** means manipulating research materials, equipment or processes, or changing or omitting data or results such that the research is not accurately represented in the research record.⁴⁵ It could mean omitting critical or adverse data from the research report, which is known as *obfuscation*.
- (3) **Plagiarism** means the appropriation of another person's ideas, processes, results or words without giving appropriate credit.⁴⁶

However, research misconduct does not include honest errors or differences of opinions or interpretations or judgments.⁴⁷ In other words, research misconduct must be committed intentionally, knowingly or recklessly.

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- (2) **Falsification** means manipulating research materials, equipment or processes, or changing or omitting data or results such that the research is not accurately represented in the research record.
- (3) **Plagiarism** means the appropriation of another person's ideas, processes, results or words without giving appropriate credit.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is passing off another person's work as one's own. It also encompasses reusing one's own work without citations. It involves the copying of text, ideas, images or data without proper citation or referencing.⁴⁸

⁴³ US National Science Foundation, 'Research Misconduct', s 689.1(a).

⁴⁴ Ibid, s 689.1(a)(1).

⁴⁵ Ibid, s 689.1(a)(2).

⁴⁶ Ibid, s 689.1(a)(3).

⁴⁷ Ibid, s 689.1(b).

⁴⁸ Neeraj Lalwani, 'Plagiarism in Publications: All about Being Fair!' [2025] 35 *Indian Journal of Radiology and Imaging* 536.

Plagiarism has two constitutive elements. The first is passing off another person's work, ideas or words as one's own. This amounts to stealing or theft of intellectual property and an infringement of the rights of the original author under the Copyright Act.⁴⁹ The second is lying or deceiving the public that what is passed off is actually one's own work, ideas or words and not another person's work, ideas or words. This amounts to the tort of deceit.⁵⁰

Plagiarism ranges from unreferenced use of another person's published and unpublished ideas to submission under new authorship of a complete paper.⁵¹ There are different **types of plagiarism**. They include the following:

- (a) **Direct plagiarism or verbatim plagiarism:** This is the verbatim copying of published works, for example, word-for-word copying or doing copy and paste type of research without quotation marks and without attribution to the original source.⁵²
- (b) **Mosaic plagiarism or patchwork plagiarism:** This consists in copying small portions or few words from the multiple sources and combining them with your own words or ideas to create a new text and passing it off as your own ideas.⁵³
- (c) **Paraphrasing plagiarism or structure plagiarism:** This consists in paraphrasing or rewriting the original text by changing the structure of the words, phrases or sentences and passing it off as one's own idea without citing the original source.⁵⁴
- (d) **Accidental plagiarism:** This consists in using words or ideas from published works but unintentionally failing or omitting to cite the source or incorrectly citing the source.⁵⁵
- (e) **Self-plagiarism or auto plagiarism:** This occurs when one reuses significant portions of one's own previously published work or works without proper acknowledgement or citation of the original source.⁵⁶

Plagiarism may be **detected** in a number of ways. It may be detected from information received from reviewers or other editors. It may also be detected from literature search for related papers by the author. It may further be detected by commercial software or free tools such as **Ithenticate**,⁵⁷

⁴⁹ Copyright Act 2022, s 108(1).

⁵⁰ Apostolos Paralikas, 'Can Ghostwriting be Considered Consensual Plagiarism?' [2022] 63(1) *IDEA – The Law Review of the Franklin Pierce Center for Intellectual Property* 67, 71.

⁵¹ NC Jenn, 'Common Issues in Research and Publication' [2006] 1(2-3) *Academy of Family Physicians of Malaysian* 74, 75.

⁵² AS Warsy and IA Warsy, 'Publish Ethically or Perish' [2020] 2(4) *Journal of Nature and Science of Medicine* 186, 190-191.

⁵³ Neeraj Lalwani, 'Plagiarism in Publications: All about Being Fair!' [2025] 35 *Indian Journal of Radiology and Imaging* 536, 538.

⁵⁴ Ibid 538.

⁵⁵ Ibid 538.

⁵⁶ AS Warsy and IA Warsy, 'Publish Ethically or Perish' [2020] 2(4) *Journal of Nature and Science of Medicine* 186, 191.

⁵⁷ <https://ithenticate.com>

Turnitin,⁵⁸ which partnered with **CrossRef**,⁵⁹ and **similarity checker**.⁶⁰ These tools may be used to detect similarities between manuscripts. It is advisable that such checks should be done before submission of any manuscript for publication.⁶¹

There are many **ways to handle plagiarism**. The first could be retraction or withdrawal of the offending paper from publication or, if already published, from circulation. The second could be banning the offending authors from publication in the journal for a number of years and informing editors of related journals of the action. The third could be placing the authors on a “watch list” for careful examination of their submissions prior to requesting reviews. The fourth could loss of grant from research funding or donor agencies.⁶²

Finally, published literary work is protected under the Copyright Act⁶³ and violators could be prosecuted by the Nigerian Copyright Commission.⁶⁴ The copyright owner can also institute civil proceedings to recover damages concurrently with the criminal proceedings.⁶⁵

Unethical Practices in Authorship

Authorship has been aptly described as ‘the currency of research publication.’⁶⁶ This is because, in academic careers, authorship forms the basis for appointments, rewards and career advancements. Who, then, is an author? Put differently, what are the indices or criteria for crediting a person with authorship of research publication?

There is no universally agreed definition of authorship. However, the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors has provided a definition of authorship beyond the medical field.⁶⁷ It states that **authorship** credit should be based only on substantial contribution to the content of a research study. Such contribution includes conception and design of the study; or analysis and interpretation of data; or drafting the article or revising it critically for important intellectual content; and final approval of the version to be published. Under these criteria, participation solely in the acquisition of funding or collection of data does not justify authorship. General supervision of the research is also not sufficient for authorship.⁶⁸

⁵⁸ <https://turnitin.com>

⁵⁹ <https://www.crossref.org>

⁶⁰ <https://www.grammarly.com>

⁶¹ Camille Yip and Nian-Lin Reena Han and Ban Leong Sng, ‘Legal and Ethical Issues in Research’ [2016] *Indian Journal of Anesthesia* 684, 686.

⁶² Neeraj Lalwani, ‘Plagiarism in Publications: All about Being Fair!’ [2025] 35 *Indian Journal of Radiology and Imaging* 536, 540.

⁶³ Copyright Act 2022, s 2(1)(a).

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, s 44.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, s 41.

⁶⁶ R Berk, ‘Irresponsible Co-authorship’ [1989] 152 *American Journal of Radiology* 719-720.

⁶⁷ Chris Graf and others, ‘Best Practice Guidelines on Publication Ethics: A Publisher’s Perspective’ [2007] 61 *International Journal of Clinical Practice* 1-26.

⁶⁸ International Committee of Medical Journal Editors, ‘Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts Submitted to Biomedical Journals’ [1994] 150(2) *Canadian Medical Association Journal* 147, 149.

Thus, the indices or criteria for authorship are clear. For a person to qualify as an author, he or she must have made substantial contribution to the intellectual content of the research study. In this sense, a person could be credited with authorship if he conceived and designed the manuscript; or if he analyzed and interpreted the data; or if he drafted the original manuscript or revised it critically; or if he approved the final version to be published.⁶⁹ Thus, an author should participate sufficiently in the production of the manuscript to take credit and responsibility for it. Any person who could not meet these criteria should not be listed as an author or contributor of a research publication.

However, there is prevalence of many instances of unethical practices in authorship and scholarly publications. The instances include honorary or gift authorship, guest authorship, coerced authorship and ghost authorship. These unethical practices undermine research integrity.

Honorary authorship, also known as gift authorship, is the inclusion of a person as author who has not contributed substantially to the paper. The honorary author is usually a well-known author or an established authority in the field. Thus, it is the actual author that voluntarily lists the honorary author with a ‘gift’ of authorship. The main reason for including the honorary author is to increase the chances of acceptance of the paper for publication and funding.⁷⁰

Guest authorship is a form of honorary authorship in which a person who has not made any substantial contribution to the manuscript is listed as author to gain favour. In some cases, graduate students include the names of their supervisors as authors as a sign of gratitude for supervision or guidance.⁷¹ In other cases, authors may have mutual agreement to include each other as guest authors to increase their publications. Thus, an author may include the name of his colleague as a guest author for including him in an earlier publication.

Coerced authorship, also known as pressured authorship, is the inclusion of a senior colleague as an author at his own instance. Usually, it is the senior member that uses his or her position to pressure a junior colleague to include his or her name as author without substantial contribution to the manuscript.⁷² In one instance, a junior colleague who wrote a paper gave the manuscript to his senior colleague to edit and advise on the appropriate journal for publication only to discover that the senior colleague unilaterally added her name as first author and published the paper.

⁶⁹ See NC Jenn, ‘Common Ethical Issues in Research and Publication’ [2006] 1(2-3) *Academy of Family Physicians of Malaysian* 74, 75.

⁷⁰ VH Feeser and JR Simon, ‘The Ethical Assignment of Authorship in Scientific Publications: Issues and Guideline’ [2008] 15(10) *Academic Emergency Medicine* 963, 965.

⁷¹ VN Gureev and IG Lukizor and NA Mazov, ‘Unethical Authorship in Scientific Publications (A Review of the Problem)’ [2019] 46(4) *Scientific and Technical Information Processing* 219, 221-222.

⁷² VH Feeser and JR Simon, ‘The Ethical Assignment of Authorship in Scientific Publications: Issues and Guideline’ [2008] 15(10) *Academic Emergency Medicine* 963, 964; Rachel So, ‘Ghost Authorship in Scholarly Publications’ <<https://project-rachel.4open.science>> accessed 30 April 2026.

Sold authorship involves the payment for a place in the byline or list of authors.⁷³ It is the inclusion of a person who has not made any substantial contribution to the production of a manuscript as author on payment of prices indicated for various positions in the byline or list of authors. It is simply the commercialization of authorship and constitutes a brazen violation of publication ethics.

Ghost authorship occurs when a person who made a substantial contribution to the production of article, seminar or project is not mentioned in the byline or list of authors. This practice contrasts sharply with gift, guest, coerced or sold authorship in which persons who made no contributions are listed as authors. In other words, in ghost authorship, the person who actually produced the research output is excluded from the list of authors.⁷⁴

Ghostwriting originated from politics and administration. Politicians had their speeches written by professional speech writers.⁷⁵ However, the practice has taken a fraudulent turn in academic writing. In practice, the researcher hires a professional writer, called ghost author, who writes assignments, seminars, projects or dissertations. The ultimate publication carries the name of the researcher who paid for the work as the sole author and completely excludes the name of the actual author or ghost writer. This practice erodes research integrity and perpetuates academic fraud.⁷⁶

Unethical Practices in Authorship

Gift authorship is a form of honorary authorship in which a person who has not made significant contribution to the manuscript is listed as author to increase its chances of acceptance or funding.

Guest authorship is a form of honorary authorship in which a person who has not made significant contribution to the manuscript is listed as author to gain favour such as reciprocal guest authorship.

Coerced authorship occurs when a senior colleague uses his or her position to pressure a junior colleague to include his or her name as author without any significant contribution to the paper.

Sold authorship is the inclusion of a person on payment of prices indicated for various positions in the byline or list of authors.

Ghost authorship occurs when a person known as a ghost author or ghostwriter is hired to write seminar, project or article which carries only the name of the researcher as sole author.

Unethical Practices in Publication

⁷³ Gureev (n 71) 222.

⁷⁴ NE Osadebe, 'Authorship and Co-authorship: Some Basic Facts Librarians Should Know' [2010] 3 *Journal of Information Science and Technology* 25, 27.

⁷⁵ Apostolos Paralikas, 'Can Ghostwriting be Considered Consensual Plagiarism?' [2022] 63(1) *IDEA – The Law Review of the Franklin Pierce Center for Intellectual Property* 67, 72.

⁷⁶ VN Gureev and IG Lukizor and NA Mazov, 'Unethical Authorship in Scientific Publications (A Review of the Problem)' [2019] 46(4) *Scientific and Technical Information Processing* 219, 221-222; VH Feeser and JR Simon, 'The Ethical Assignment of Authorship in Scientific Publications: Issues and Guideline' [2008] 15(10) *Academic Emergency Medicine* 963, 964.

The most unethical practices in research involve substantial reproduction of a previous study, bringing no novelty to the academic community, without proper acknowledgment. If such duplicates have different authors, then they may be guilty of plagiarism, whereas papers with overlapping authors may represent self-plagiarism.

Thus, the list of **unethical practices in publication** includes duplicate publication, self-plagiarism and salami slicing. The term **duplicate publication** refers to the publication of a paper that overlaps substantially with a previously published one.⁷⁷ It can also mean the publication of an article or significant part of an article in more than one journal without making full disclosure at the time of submission. In most cases, the new paper reports the same data as the previously published paper to answer the same or similar research question.⁷⁸

If all the papers have the same author or authors, this may amount to **self-plagiarism**. If the authors are different, it may amount to plagiarism simpliciter. However, the publication of a previously published paper in a different journal, either in a different language or for a different readership, with the knowledge and agreement of the editors of both journals may not be unwarranted duplicate publication.⁷⁹

Salami slicing is the practice of splitting single academic research into two or more slices or units to increase the number of publications.⁸⁰ In other words, research that can be published together as one study is sliced into least publishable units and published separately to inflate the author's publication records. In most cases, the multiple publications have overlapping words and data.⁸¹

Unethical Practices in Publication

Salami slicing is the practice of splitting a single academic study into slices or multiple publications to inflate the author's publication record and rank.

Self-plagiarism is the reuse of a significant portion of one's previously published paper without proper acknowledgement or citation.

Duplicate publication, or redundant publication, refers to the publication of a single research article in more than one journal without making full disclosure at the time of submission.

The **implications of unethical practices** in research and publication include the following:

- (1) **Blacklisting:** Funders may blacklist any author who commits any research misconduct or unethical practices in authorship and publication.
- (2) **Loss of reputation:** Unethical practices will make an author to lose his reputation and thus undermine his authority and trustworthiness as a researcher.

⁷⁷ Editorial, 'Duplicate Publication and 'Salami Slicing': Ethical Issues and Practical Solutions' [2008] 45 *International Journal of Nursing Studies* 1257.

⁷⁸ Ibid 1257.

⁷⁹ Ibid 1257.

⁸⁰ NN Adams, 'Salami Slicing: Clarifying Common Misconceptions for Social Science Early-Career Researchers' [2022] 2 *Soc Sci* 1, 3.

⁸¹ CA Pierson, 'Salami Slicing – How Thin is the Slice?' [2015] 27 *Journal of the American Association of Nurse Practitioners* 65.

- (3) **Criminal liability:** Published literary work is protected under the Copyright Act. Protected literary work includes textbooks, treatises, essays, articles, letters, addresses, sermons and law reports excluding decisions of courts.⁸² Thus, if a person reproduces another person's literary works without permission or proper citation, he may be prosecuted and convicted under the Copyright Act.⁸³
- (4) **Scientific retrogression:** Unethical practices in research deceive and mislead society. In addition, when a person indulges in unethical practices, he misleads his colleagues and potentially impedes progress in his field of study.⁸⁴

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Research and publication are the means of disseminating new knowledge to the academic and scientific community. However, to safeguard the integrity of the research process and to contribute meaningfully to the advancement of knowledge, research must be conducted in a responsible manner and in accordance with established ethical standards.

However, the academic landscape has been infested with many unethical practices in research and publication. A common example is the practice of ghostwriting which has eaten deep in the fabric of academic writing. Many students and researchers now hire ghost authors to write assignments, seminars, articles and projects which are credited to the researcher as sole author.

It is against this backdrop that this paper suggests ethics training programmes for all the stakeholders in the research community including students, supervisors, authors and professional writers. It is also suggested that institutions of higher learning and research funding organizations should establish a national database for listing misconduct cases. Listing misconduct cases will serve as 'naming and shaming' measure with potential for discouraging others from engaging in similar acts of misconduct and unethical practices.

In the Republic of China, there are social punishments for research misconduct. They include prevention from getting bank loans, running a company or applying for a public job.⁸⁵ Similar measures should be introduced in Nigeria to discourage research misconduct and promote research integrity.

Finally, institutions of higher learning and research funding organizations should establish whistleblower policies that will protect and encourage whistleblowers to make good faith report of suspected cases of research misconduct and unethical practices without fear of reprisal.

⁸² Copyright Act 2022, s 108(1).

⁸³ Ibid, s 41.

⁸⁴ See generally Camille Yip and Nian-Lin Reena Han and Ban Leong Sng, 'Legal and Ethical Issues in Research' [2016] *Indian Journal of Anesthesia* 684-688.

⁸⁵ AS Warsy and IA Warsy, 'Publish Ethically or Perish' [2020] 2(4) *Journal of Nature and Science of Medicine* 186, 190-192.