

SAFEGUARDING THE SCIENTIFIC RECORD: INVESTIGATING A RESEARCH INTEGRITY CONCERN

Transcript

Research integrity cases can be complex and time consuming, but we are committed to investigating each and every case. Cases can be reported to us through different sources. These can include internal staff and editors, but many times it's external whistleblowers. We really appreciate this, but it can be quite a difficult relationship because of the restriction of what information we can share with them during an investigation.

We have a duty of care to all the parties, especially the authors whose career is really at stake in some cases. And so we are not able to share a lot of information with whistleblowers while the investigation is going on. And I appreciate that can be quite frustrating for them. We assess every concern.

So if something is especially important for health concern or a public safety concern then we prioritize those, but we investigate every concern that we get. In our experience, a concern is raised about one thing about a paper, but quite often it's not the only thing that could be potentially wrong with the paper.

So we really do try to take that holistic approach. When we get a paper on our desks, we really review, take a close look at sort of like the whole paper to see if it's not just that one concern that's being raised, but if there's something else that we need to be mindful of. And it also includes having a look at the peer review process of how this paper came to be published, to see if there's anything wrong with that.

We check the adherence to editorial policies and see if that's completely up to the standards that we expect. And if we find something that we do agree is a concern, we always contact authors in line with COPE guidelines to give them a chance to respond to those concerns. Either explain things, how something happened or provide data to support the published article.

We investigate concerns relating to issues such as ethics and approvals, plagiarism, image integrity data, unverified authorship, citations and authorship disputes. The research integrity group is really a global enterprise. We have a presence in basically every office. Our team consists of people of various different backgrounds.

So we have people with a background in linguistics or philosophy, but also in chemistry or even physics. Sometimes they take on highly specialized cases, but we generally have a fairly general approach. A plagiarism case in a physics journal is not too different from a plagiarism case in the philosophy journal.

Having a more broad approach and a broad understanding of research integrity issues and applying that to every field that we that we cover at Springer Nature is really important. So if you look back ten years ago, there were not so many research integrity cases, but as it is progressing, as now we are seeing it, there are more and more research integrity cases.

There's been a lot of emphasis on the systematic manipulation of the publication process and paper mills. But we also just see a lot of just individual cases where something has gone wrong, someone has made a mistake, and it ends up on our desks, or there's an authorship dispute where there's a fallout between academics, over the authorship of a paper.

That's just what happens in academic publishing. So it's not all systematic manipulation, huge amount of paper mills getting out there. We really deal with just real world cases involving real researchers who have made a mistake. And we try to work with them to correct the literature. People are a major part of the process.

And people can be unreliable, people can be forgetful. People can take a long time to reply or take an action, because they have lives outside of my investigations. And I find waiting one of the most difficult parts of it. It can take quite a long time to resolve a research integrity case. The due process and the due diligence that we do, together with our editors and then having to engage with authors when we ask them to address the concerns that we have will then need to be fed back to an Editor-in-Chief.

There are quite a few steps that needs to be taken until we get to an appropriate editorial decision or what needs to happen with a paper. We are committed to carefully investigating all cases to inform decisions on the most appropriate outcome to protect the publication record.