



ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

General perspective to plagiarism acts among masters, professors and postgraduate students of Ahvaz Jundishapur University of Medical Sciences, Iran.

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Abstract: The word Greek origin "Plagion" is the root of word plagiarism and in Latin it is "plagiarius", which mean kidnapper, seducer, plunderer and literacy thief. Plagiarism is a serious violation of publishing ethics in academic institutes. This study aimed to examine the conceptual awareness of masters, professors and postgraduate students of Ahvaz Jundishapur University of Medical Sciences (AJUMS) related to plagiarism issues. A self-made questionnaire was used with two different parts included the demographic variables and questions to elicit their conceptual awareness to five more common issues of plagiarism. Participants were 155 Masters, professors and 305 Postgraduate students in AJUMS in South West of Iran. The results show that less than half of the total number of masters, professors and 26.5% of postgraduate students succeeded in giving the right perception of all five common plagiarism forms, so are not familiar enough with plagiarism issue. If we add uncommon types in our list, knowledge level may become less than this rate. The academic institutes have to plan a comprehensive research ethics educational program for increasing understanding and awareness of academicians.

Key words: Plagiarism; Awareness; Research Ethics; Academic Institutes.

Introduction

Plagiarism is closely associated with person or public moral and academic values going to be a crucial issue in the field of medical researches (Park, 2003). The most common form of academic dishonesty and scientific misconduct is plagiarism (Ghajarzadeh *et al.*, 2013) which is an increasingly wide spread practice in universities and research institutes (Bahadori *et al.*, 2012). The word plagiarism as literary is coming from the English word "plagiary" as a form of intellectual theft and academic dishonesty (Eret, 2010). The term plagiarism means to use another person's idea or a part of their work and pretend that it is your own. Also defined as "the practice of taking someone else's work or Ideas and passing them off as one's own and also the theft of ideas or of written passage or work where these are passed off as one's own work without acknowledgement of their true origin, or piece of writing stolen" (Garg and Singh, 2014). Some traced the term of the word plagiarism from different English dictionaries that

defines as the act of taking the work or idea of someone else and pass it off as one's own, even plagiarism may be committed as self-plagiarism which defines any misconduct of one's own work in another challenging issue and as a new work issue (Eret, 2010, Garg and Singh, 2014). Studies show that medical students lacked knowledge about some of the most common plagiarism (Shirazi *et al.*, 2010). So it needs to be taken into account in academic education and strategies (Park, 2003). With increasing the new technologies and easy access to information, plagiarism rate is raised (Dias and Bastos, 2014), however plagiarism is not a new issue as has been plaguing literature, art and sciences since times immemorial (Bipeta, 2012). Different understandings of plagiarism are contributed to the prevalence of plagiarism in scientific community (Bahadori *et al.*, 2012) and it occurs at all level of scholarship (Bretag, 2013). Plagiarism is a serious issue for students who are undertaking training to enter professions where

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integrity, honesty and trustworthiness are paramount to their relationship to work role and duty (Kenny, 2007). In medical sciences researches plagiarism is so important because they are dealing with human life, However plagiarism damages all scientific products (Keyvan *et al.*, 2013). As most academic researches argued that plagiarism as a serious violation of publishing ethics and the most important causes is that our authors are unfamiliar with plagiarism (Bahadori *et al.*, 2012, Fealy *et al.*, 2012). This study aims to examine the familiarity and awareness of postgraduate students and Masters, professors in Ahvaz Jundishapur University of Medical Sciences related to plagiarism issue.

Material and Methods

This is a part of wide research emergent on five medical science universities by cooperation of Ahvaz Jundishapur and Kermanshah Universities of Medical Sciences. Based on the universities' academic population a sample size of academic masters, professors and postgraduate students was calculated. The proportion of master – professors in Ahvaz was 155 and postgraduate students were 305. This work performed by authority to execute of Vice Chancellor of Research and Technology, Ahvaz Jundishapur University of Medical Sciences. Postgraduate students randomly selected from faculties, student hostels and the masters, professors from their academic office and educational hospitals. Participation for both groups was voluntarily. To gather data a questionnaire was developed by researchers and evaluated and confirmed by department of bio-statistical and Epidemiology of Kermanshah University of Medical Sciences. In the first part of the questionnaire participants were asked to provide demographic and general scientific information. Second part designed to elicit participants' conception and awareness related to five most often familiar and more commonly in practice plagiarism based on list of different plagiarism forms (Maurer *et al.*, 2006), and also general plagiarism prevalence among them. In this stage we evaluate only the awareness of participants. The first act which selected for study was "Copy and paste": coping word to word textual contents from one or more someone else's work as his/ her own; and second was "Paraphrasing" means changing grammar/synonymy reordering sentences in original work or restating same contents in different words. Other plagiarism types which drawn from the list were: "No proper use of quotation marks": failing to identify exact parts of borrowed contents; "Misinformation of references": adding references to incorrect or non-existing original sources and "Translated plagiarism" as cross language content translation and use without references to original work. Participants asked only to mark the "No" or

"Yes" based on their perception to plagiarism. Based on these five applications we assess their viewpoints and awareness to different types of plagiarism. We evaluated participant's awareness plagiarism with respect to gender, age, institution, scientific level, academic field, marriage status and participation to research ethics and article writing workshops. The research protocol was approved by Ethic Committees of Ahvaz and Kermanshah Universities' of Medical Sciences. Data analyzed using the STATA/SE12 Software.

Results

Respondents who participated in study were 155 for masters, professors and 305 postgraduate students. the average age of postgraduate student sample was 30.33 ± 0.29 and majority (85.3%) were in age range of 25-34 years. The masters, professors average age was 43.78 ± 0.69 year and mostly (82%) in age range of over 45 years. From sample respondents of postgraduate students 96 persons (31.5%) was male and 209 (68.5%) female while masters- professors were 85 (54.8%) and 70 (45.2%) respectively. About 34% of postgraduate students in time of study were married and about 66% single, while masters- professor's marriage statue were 84.5% and 15.5 % respectively. About 76% of students were M.Sc. and 24% were Ph.D. from all masters, professors random 48 (31%) were in master academics level and 81 (52%) assistant professor and 26 (17%) associated professor and professor. From all respondents 64.5% of postgraduate students and 84.5 % Masters, professors participated in scientific article writing workshops. The proportion of respondents who participated in Research Ethics Workshops for students and masters- professors was 31.3% and 79.5% respectively. General perspective of respondents to five selected different plagiarisms "copy and paste, paraphrasing, no proper use of quotation marks, misinformation of references and translated plagiarism" was evaluated. The results show that from first form of plagiarism in our list (copy and paste) about 90% of masters, professors and 76% of postgraduate students know that this act indeed is plagiarism, whilst about 90% and 94% of masters, professors and postgraduate students considered the act of "misinformation of references" as plagiarism respectively. Detailed level of understanding of respondents to plagiarism conception demonstrated in Table 1. The results also show from five forms of considered plagiarism among masters- professors and postgraduate students there was a significant difference in three type of plagiarism "copy and paste (0.001), misinformation of references (0.05) and Paraphrasing (0.001)", but not the other forms. The results indicate that there are no significant differences among the postgraduate students in relation to marriage status and education level in term of plagiarism knowledge,

but were statistically significant differences among them regarding to age (0.04) and gender (0.002). The results also show non-significant differences among masters, professors in relation to age, gender, marriage status and scientific level related to plagiarism knowledge, but it was statistically significant differences among them regarding to scientific field (0.03). No significant relationship found between participating "article writing" and "research ethics" workshops and plagiarism

knowledge among master-professors, but the difference was significant among postgraduate students (0.03 & 0.001). Overall result of masters, professors and postgraduate student awareness to plagiarism show that about 46.5% of masters, professors know all five types of our list as plagiarism act, while 26.6% of postgraduate students know all five types as plagiarism applications (Table 2).

Table 1: Understanding and awareness level of respondents to five common forms of plagiarism.

Plagiarism Types	Masters-professors		Postgraduate Students		P value
	frequencies	Percent	frequencies	Percent	
Copy and paste	140	90.3	221	76.2	0.001
Paraphrasing	92	61.7	116	40.6	0.001
No proper use of quotation marks	141	91.6	264	89.2	0.42
Misinformation of references	137	89	282	94	0.05
Translated plagiarism	148	95.5	276	93.2	0.34

Table 2: General perspective of participants to five forms of plagiarism.

Number of Plagiarisms to say "Yes"	Masters-professors		Post graduate students	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
0	0	0	1	0.3
1	0	0	12	3.9
2	6	3.9	18	5.9
3	22	14.2	66	21.6
4	55	35.5	127	41.6
5	72	46.5	81	26.6

Discussion

The results indicated that 90% of Master, professors and 76% of postgraduate students know that the "copy and paste" in fact is a plagiarism act. This confirms other studies (Wilkinson, 2009). In the other hand this type of plagiarism is one of the more common plagiarism among researchers (Hart and Friesner, 2004, Vieyra *et al.*, 2013) but studies show that considerable rate of students often copy and paste from book without references (Dias and Bastos, 2014). This study show that 89 % of masters, professors and 94% of postgraduate students considered the "Misinformation of references" as plagiarism application as other studies has shown (Cheema *et al.*, 2011). More than 90% of all respondents know two forms of our list "no proper use of Quotation marks" and "translated plagiarism" as plagiarism acts, whilst some studies show only "no proper use of Quotation marks" as most known plagiarism form (Sarlauskiene and Stabingis, 2014, Cole, 2010). The results also indicate that there is a significant difference between the general perspective of master-professors and postgraduate students related to two types of plagiarisms in our list "misinformation of references" and "translated plagiarism". But the differences were significant among them in other three forms of plagiarism included "Copy and paste" "Misinformation of

references "and "Translated plagiarism" ($p= 0.05-0.001$). This means both master-professors and postgraduate student have a consistent view point and to these types of plagiarism. If we consider the general perspective of masters, professors and postgraduate students related to different forms of plagiarisms as unique, we may could their awareness will be acceptable, but overall result show that only 46.5% of Masters- professors and 26.6% of postgraduate students considered all five types of our list as plagiarism. This means more than 50% of masters- professors and 70% of postgraduate students are not overall familiar enough with most common plagiarism applications as we expected. However, our list was included five most common types of plagiarisms. Other studies also show that academicians only partially are aware about the common forms of plagiarisms (Ghajarzadeh *et al.*, 2013, Cheema *et al.*, 2011). The results of this study indicated that there is a significant difference among the postgraduate students in relation to age ($P=0.04$), gender ($P=0.002$), and education level ($P=0.3$) in term of plagiarism knowledge. This declines the results of other studies (Eret, 2010, Fealy *et al.*, 2012). However, the results show that among masters, professors only in terms of age and scientific levels are statistically significant difference. So, scientific experience affects the awareness of masters, professors related to plagiarism applications. The

relationship between participated "article writing" and "research ethics" workshops and plagiarism knowledge among master-professors was not significant, but among post graduate students was statistically significant ($P= 0.03$ and 0.001 respectively), as other studied shown (Fealy *et al.*, 2012).

Conclusion

Plagiarism known as a global problem which occurs in different areas of our life (Chuda and Navrat, 2010), in other hand the studies show that medical college teachers and students share a considerable level of ignorance regarding the issue that they do not really know that they are plagiarizing (Shirazi *et al.*, 2010). In this study also considerable rate of participants did not succeeded in giving the right perception of all given plagiarism most common forms. This means if we add uncommon types of plagiarism in our list, knowledge level may decrease considerably. Therefore, in order to increasing academician awareness and to decrease plagiarism, we have to plan sets of comprehensive educational program as this study show that educational workshops could significantly affects the conceptual awareness of postgraduate students. However we need honor codes and relevant laws and rules and different detection and punishments (Bretag, 2013), but the clear definition and right understanding of plagiarism by providing training programs is essential to avoid plagiarism (Bretag, 2013, Sarlauskienė and Stabingis, 2014).

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