Ethics in Publications: National Researchers' Experiences of Social Sciences Field in Mexico.

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Abstract

Ethics guides individuals to perform good or bad actions that allow solve their problems and a bad or good ethical behavior adopted has an effect for the rest of their lives and in scientific research field ethics plays a very important role. In this work we show 24 researchers' experiences of social sciences field and belonging to The National System of Researchers (NSR) in Mexico, about ethics in publications, specifically unacceptable and questionable ethical behavior, ethical behavior in papers evaluation by editors and conflict of interests. Data were gathered throughout a semi-structured interview and the information analysis was to read and analyze each respondents' answer to identify the developed behavior. Researchers mentioned have known 34 experiences, 27 about ethical lacks in papers evaluation by editors or arbiters and 17 related with conflict of interests and they recognize to know ethical principles and they think it must survive in all scientific work, so they are agree apply it in their scientific and academic production, however some of them coincided in their responses regard unacceptable or questionable plagiarism behavior, which has been present in some cases and they have known situations of favoritism in proofreading to some authors or institutions, or soften project results of institutions to justify profits without obtaining efficient results and it constitutes a conflict between researchers.

Keywords: Ethics, Research, Publications, Researchers, Social Sciences.

Introduction

Research is a hard work that involves a preview preparation, knowledge techniques, methodologies, data management, foreign languages, knowledge and a great discipline to do it. Knowledge spread is an important aspect of academic progress, human development and improves health and life conditions. In teaching homework just like research, a publication is an important component and it will not be complete if results don't publish, although it had been negatives. However, to researchers publication carry out; require gather some features which are supported by editorial teams and an editorial arbitration process or scientist review, which guarantee minimum quality standards of publication (Becerra, s/f), independently of research type, it must undergo the same scientific and ethical rigor (Barrio-Cantalejo & Simón Lorda, 2006), because when a misconduct exist, it confuses, disorients and can lead to wrong ways to whom start research activity generating mistrust about scientist research utility by important society sectors (Hirsch, 2012).

The aim of this research is to know researchers' experiences or anecdotes of social sciences field and belonging to The National System of Researchers (NSR) in Mexico, about ethics in publications, specifically unacceptable and questionable ethical behavior, ethical behavior in papers evaluation by editors and conflict of interests.

Literature Review

Ethics in Publications

Ethics is the moral study, it means principles, values and regulations combination that guide the human behavior in society (Ojeda de López, Quintero & Machado, 2007; González, 2002) and when we talk about ethics in publications, usually author and editor's aims are different. Author main purpose is to spreads his scientist experience and treats that his work is published in the shortest possible time, while editor responsibility and goal is selects and publishes a variety of scientifically valid, original and relevant work to reach the journal goals. Nowadays, editorial review process by experts is recognized as the standard to define a quality journal in any scientific discipline (Britos, 2013). This review stage is usually the most complicated and slow from this process and it is the main reason of waiting long time in some papers. Arbitrators are active researchers collaborating in anonymous form, disinterested and they do not receive any pay in this evaluation stage; however, they do that specialized literature represents a real contribution of knowledge (Britos, 2013).

Unacceptable Ethical Behavior in Publication Process

According to Aluja & Birke (2004: 100-101), authors present a significant difference between unacceptable and questionable ethical behavior in scientific research. They affirm that, in general one of the biggest challenges that scientific community has faced has been define what does a bad scientific behavior is? and what behavior really fit this concept to establish norms. Among unacceptable ethical behavior in publication process they mention: a) data manufacturing. Is to say, data invent and experiments that they weren't done or things description that it doesn't exist; b) data falsify. It means modify experimental data to produce a result to fits researcher expectations and c) plagiarism. It means ideas appropriation or innovative methods, text data like own without source mention or recognize the creator idea, even if mention the author, but his used exact words don't appear in quotation marks. Subtle plagiarism talking or collaborating with colleagues to whom you have confidence, and research plans or ideas is shared without suspect that run plagiarism risk.

Plagiarism is a topic that affects all scientist knowledge fields and educational levels, it also includes ideas graphically expressed (photography, films, cartoons) or sculptural and musical work (Bermúdez et al., 2013) and its studies, understandings and descriptions must carry out from any optical or analytic perspective (Schulz & Katime, 2003). Plagiarism is too much frequent, especially by availability of scientific work on the network. Schulz & Katime (2003) mention that the probable reason to commit plagiarism is because the researcher doesn't want to think, and he wants to get a fast profit or by pressure to publish in a scientific journal with high impact factor because gives him an evaluation that can lead him to a better work position or academic distinction. Other authors consider that plagiarism can happen by intentional form or not intentional, but independently the researcher's intention, plagiarism is a dishonest academic behavior and it has consequences (Tudela & Aznar, 2013).

Although nowadays, exist filters to identify plagiarism, has not been possible avoid it; neither fines imposition to authors fraud has given good results (Albis, 2013). According to Miranda (2013) and Becerra (s/f), different plagiarism ranks exist with common features, but all of them are illegal and unethical and they mention:

a) Total plagiarism. When a complete work is copied and showed as your own.
b) Through translate plagiarism. When a work published in a foreign language is translated total or partially and is published in another language like your own.
c) Partial plagiarism. When a work extract is taken and added to an own work without source mention or the used words doesn't appear in quotation marks.
d) Via paraphrase plagiarism. When an author's paragraph is taken (using synonymous   or changing grammar, but keeping the original idea) and added in a work like your own without author mention.
e) Auto plagiarism. When an author uses an extract of his work and is added to new ones or different works.
f) Coauthor fictitious. When a researcher is included in his students' work although he only has given counsel or reviewing without participating in the research and of course without writing anything.
g) The black. Is when an author does a work and he sells it, and the person who buys it boasts as the authentic author.

Questionable Ethical Behavior in Publication Process

This kind of behavior puts at risk the expected ethical principles of a scientific community like integrity, honesty or confidence among others and according to Aluja & Birke (2004: 103-105), can be classified as:

a) Improperly data keeping, basic information that can't be copied or verified.
b) Information selection. Data tampering or bad information, deleting it and increasing data advisable to confirm hypothesis.
c) Incorrect bibliographic citation or important quotes omission. Is an author's obligation to do a deep review about his topic background to avoid showing like original a work that is not yours; because it is plagiarism or wrong appropriation and a lot of time bibliography is copied without has been consulted the work directly.
d) Malpractice. It is when someone does not follows the correct procedures or includes wrong information although it has been by neglect, is to say without bad intention.
e) Submit a paper at the same time to more than a journal.
f) Multiple publications. It means dividing a work into small fragments and publishing it in independent form, to produce the greatest number of publications.
g) Publications duplication. Publishes a part or totally a paper by the same authors when it has been published before in a journal or other electronics and printing documents, without knowledge of journal's editors involved.
h) Reporting the same paper with different titles
i) Reporting a paper when it has not been accepted either published yet just to mention some.

Ethical Behavior in Process of Papers Evaluation

Transform a scientific work into a capable text to be published requires, by arbiters part, a perceptive vision to capture details and send a comprehensive opinion, and by editors part, the constant enthusiasm and the journal's standard safeguard throughout an honest and disinterested attitude. Cooperation between editors and arbiters give to author an undeniable protection to face omissions, errors or faults that otherwise would not be able to detect (Hirsch, 2012).

An arbiter is an editor's assessor of a scientific journal. His function is to advise to editor about if a work is appropriate to be published or not. He doesn't decide by himself, he must be a recognized expert in the field of study, he reviews and analyzes works, its importance, work's originality and validity, work's designs and methodology, discussions relevance, scientific merit, quotations and references appropriate, results, knowledge contributions, conclusions, form quality, syntaxes, coherent paragraphs and no grammatical errors among other things (Britos, 2013). Is very important for an arbiter to be up to date and knows his specialty very well, although this feature is not enough to define a good reviewer, also is

necessary to have a great ability to judgment, to teach, to know write, seriousness, service spirit, tact, discretion and honesty (Greene, 1998).

Some journals consider proofreading is not always possible to reach the comprehension in this aspect and avoid arbiters little careful, deliver offensive comments not acceptable, sometimes with certain arrogance and a language little polite that is destructive rather.

For this reason, the editorial's work is review all the arbiters' reports, to eliminate those that not contribute to improving a work if it is accepted, or not to improve future works if it is rejected (Testa, 1998).

To face these discrepancies, different procedures have been introduced by the journals to avoid it or reduce it. Normally a commitment statement by the reviser is requested; sending questionnaires with clear guidelines for the information analysis. Some journals send to their revisers criteria to consider to make a decision about the evaluated work through an assessment sheet (Pessanha, 1998).

According to good practices to publication manual (2016) and Aluja & Birke (2004: 111-112), they recommend applying the basics ethical criterion during the arbitration process, which are:

a) Works manage to be reviewed. Works to be reviewed should not be retained, either copied.
b) Data inappropriate use. Reviewers and editors should no use data, arguments or works interpretation without author's permission.
c) Punctuality. Work's revision should not be delayed. The reviewer should do his revision and deliver his report at the proposal time and not affect who sent the work.
d) Respect intellectual property. Ideas, data, and methods described in work under revision should be respected as well as the intellectual property of the author.
e) Confidentiality. Reviewers and editors should maintain severe confidentiality about the work in revision, and they should not use the information without author's permission.
f) Arbiter should never accept work involving conflict of interests. Work should be evaluated based on author's merits without involving personal criterion or professional skills. Who realize an evaluation should reject the work revision when maintaining a professional relationship or personal with the authors and should inform the reason of that decision.
g) Sources of information's recognition. Who realize an evaluation should confirm that important published works about the topic have been quoted and check the bibliography.
h) Objectivity. Who realize an evaluation, should objectively judge the quality work, without presentation and text writing neglect.

Conflict of Interests

Conflict of interests exists when an author, a reviewer or an editor have financial activities like employment, consultancy, actions possession, professional fees or testimony of specialist personal (Salas, 2010) that influence their actions improperly (Rafecas, 2012), academic competitiveness (Reyes, et al., 2006), affectation to professionals in their interests or commitments that could engage their sense, their investigation informs and their communication with investigation subjects, participants, patients, customers (Camí, 1995) or implications with a third person, to whom the professional has contractual obligations like investigation sponsoring, employer or insurance company (Martínez, 2009).

A scientific misconduct is not always associated with conflict of interests but increases the possibility it happens (Carobene, 2013). Some conflict of interests in scientific research named by Aluja & Birke (2004) and quoted by Hirsch (2012) are:

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March 2018
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a) Compensations. Any kind of rewards that researchers receive by a consultancy or paper that contributes to a product or service commercialization, always it is not modest and involves a conflict of interests.
b) Nepotism and corruption. It is unacceptable ethically, hiring relatives or persons who finish living and working in other place.
c) Multiple pays by the same work. When a researcher receives an institutional salary where he works and another by who sponsored his project.
d) Effort conflicts. - When dedication, time and applied efforts to other activities influence in the good work performance.
e) Consciousness of conflicts. When teacher or researcher's beliefs about the study is inflexible and influence to give a judgment.

Methodology

A group of twenty four researchers of a public university were invited to participate in this research previous appointment and consent of them to collect information about their experiences or anecdotes like researchers.

Researchers were interviewed throughout a semi-structured interview; which consisted in six formulated questions related with ethical behavior in papers publication like a) in what knowledge field do you have your NSR?; b) when did you get the NSR recognition?; c) what type of research do you usually realize?; d) do you know or have you had knowledge about some associated case with unacceptable and questionable ethical behavior committed in papers publication?; e) do you know some related case with ethical lacks committed by editors or arbiters in papers evaluation? and f) do you remember some conflict of interests anecdote?.

Interviews were carried out from September 2015 to January 2016 and the information analysis procedure was to read and analyze each respondents' answer to identify unacceptable and questionable ethically behavior in papers publication; ethical behavior in papers evaluation by editors and conflict of interests. Finally a qualitative approach and descriptive level research was developed.

Results

The semi-structured interview results applied to Mexican researchers of Social Science field and belonging to The National System of Researchers (NSR) are shown, as well as each respondents' answer analysis.

Regarding the first question: in what knowledge field do you have your NSR?

All of researchers answered belong to field five of knowledge, is to say Social Sciences field.

Second question: When did you get the NSR recognition and what level actually do you have?

Most of researchers (19) answered to be in level 1, a few in level 2 (4) and only one researcher didn't answer this question.

Regarding to start of recognition date by NSR in 1995, 2000, 2004, 2009, 2010 and 2011 only a researcher was recognized by year; 2007, 2012 and 2014 two researchers were recognized by year, in 2013 and 2015 three researchers by year and by 2016 five researchers were recognized, as shown in table 1.

Table 1. Level 1 and level 2 researchers and recognition date by NSR

	1995	2004	2000, 2009 2010 and 2011 1 by year	2007	2012 and 2014 2 by year	2013 and 2015 3 by year	2016	Researchers total
Researchers' recognition date by NSR	1	1	4	2	4	6	5	
NSR Level	2	2	1	2	1	1	1	
NSR level 1								19
NSR level 2								4
Didn't answer								1
								24

Source: Own elaboration

Third question: What type of research do you usually realize?

Most of researchers (10) answered they usually realize mixed researches, some of them (4) develop quantitative research, a few of them (2) do qualitative research, other (2) work in both qualitative and quantitative researches and another (2) like to do mixed, quantitative and qualitative researches, one of them prefer quantitative or mixed researches and three researchers didn't answer this question, as shown in table 2.

Table 2. Type of researches realized by researchers

Type of research	Research quantity	%
Mixed	10	41.67
Quantitative	4	16.67
Qualitative	2	8.33
Qualitative and quantitative	2	8.33
Mixed, quantitative and qualitative	2	8.33
Quantitative and mixed.	1	4.17
Didn't answer	3	12.50
Researchers total	24	100

Source: Own elaboration

Regarding fourth question. Do you know or have you had knowledge about some associated case with unacceptable and questionable ethical behavior committed in papers publication?.

Researchers said have lived 34 experiences, among it, plagiarism in different ways was the most named by them. From these experiences, they mentioned that 4 were NSR's researchers, to whom their recognition was removed because they committed information plagiarism; other had knowledge of students' documents plagiarism and doctoral thesis copy. Another researchers' experiences are they had knowledge from colleagues which committed auto plagiarism or rehash of their own research. Also researchers reported authorship or co-authorship unjustified. Two of them also mentioned have quoted their friends or systems and universities; advantage certain groups or universities with publications; ethical lacks of knowledge in researches and some students who committed ethical infractions too, without specifying which, and they delivered the same works to publish them, it means they did multiple publications. In minor proportion a researcher mentioned some experiences like submitting a paper to more than one journal; clarity lack of methodology; lacks in thesis revision by director who doesn't detect if plagiarism was committed; important literature discrimination without mention it or don't give the respective credence to all research's

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March 2018
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co-authorship and finally two researchers reported they didn't have knowledge about this question or have had some personal experience.

In table 3 a summary of unacceptable and questionable ethical behavior of which researchers reported have had knowledge is shown.

Table 3. Experiences of unacceptable and questionable ethical behavior reported by researchers

Cases	Analysis of unacceptable and questionable ethical behavior known by researchers.
1	Doctoral thesis copy
2	Students' work plagiarism
1	Information plagiarism
1	Documents plagiarism
1	Copy paste works
4	Information plagiarism by NSR's researchers
1	Ideas of others plagiarism
1	Works copy and publication
1	Methodology plagiarism without a quote
1	Publish a research's rehash of years later
1	Other publications' rehash without providing nothing new
1	Auto-plagiarism, it means a same research or rehash
3	Authorship and co-authorship unjustified.
1	Quote a system or university to advantage it
1	Quote their friends
1	Publish and benefit to other universities' researchers
1	Publish in journals that benefit certain groups
1	Research's ethical knowledge lack
1	Students' ethical knowledge lack
2	Send identical works to publish it in different journals. It means multiple publications.
1	Send the same work to proofreading to different journals.
1	Methodology clarity and check ethical lack
1	Don't do a good thesis revision by the director to detect possible plagiarism
1	Literature discrimination without mention it
1	Don't give credence to all the research's authors.
2	No experiences reported
Cases total 34	

Source: own elaboration

Regarding fifth question. Do you know some related case with ethical lacks committed by editors or arbiters in papers evaluation?

Researchers reported have lived 27 experiences, 23 of them had some anecdote in his life, they mentioned favoritism like the most common ethical lack, for example favoritism to some groups, like consolidated groups, by researchers, university, country or approach in the research type (quantitative) and accept these work to publish it. Also, ethical lacks are committed with the intention of know who is the author of some work, although arbitration has been double blind to manipulate results, it means to give a favorable or unfavorable verdict to the author. Other ethical lacks mentioned by the researchers were the evaluator criterions, which are very different from each other because while one reviewer can say that is a great work to another it isn't or it isn't commendable to be published and when the reviewer by commitment has an anger and laziness behavior to proofreading the work.

Also experiences diverse that happened only once were reported by researchers among they figure a) delay the paper revision, b) different demand criterion in papers revision depending on if it is local, national or international, c) realize a preselection process of paper and reject it before of pass the revision process with the intention to know who is the author, d) reject the paper only by enmity, d) to be judge and part (author and reviewer) at the same time in the publication place, e) influence in the investigation to change the sense of it; f) laziness by the reviewer to proofread the works, g) revision lacks of students' thesis by thesis director to find possible plagiarism and h) damage works considered very good and they aren't approved and i) influence of things and thoughts personal in the knowledge. Only four researchers reported haven't had or known some experience or case of this kind, as shown in table 4.

Table 4. Report of researchers' experiences regarding to ethical lacks by editors or arbiters in papers evaluation process.

Cases	Analysis of ethical lacks by editors or arbiters in papers evaluation process
1	Country favoritism, university or consolidated group
1	Hiding arbitration of a journal to benefit a group or researcher
2	Benefit some groups accepting their work
1	Favor papers by research type
2	Intention to know who is the work author and influence the results
1	To have knowledge of who is the author of the work although the revision is double blind
1	To have knowledge of who is the author of the work to benefit or damage him
1	Revision by request
2	Proofreading by commitment and do the work with anger and laziness
1	Delay papers revision
1	Criterion to review a work, like if it is local, national or international
1	Realize a preselection process of paper and reject it before of pass the revision process, only because the author is known
1	Reject the work by enmity
1	To be judge and part (author and reviewer) at the same time in the publication place
1	Influence in the investigation to change the sense of it
1	Laziness by the reviewer to do works proofread and reject it without have read it
1	Lack of students' thesis revision by the thesis director to find possible plagiarism
1	Damage works considered very good to be published and they aren't approved
1	Influence of personal things in the knowledge
4	Haven't had or known some experience of this kind

Source: Own elaboration

Regarding the researchers' experiences about conflict of interests, was formulated the next question. Question sixth. Do you remember some conflict of interests' anecdote?

Researchers reported have had knowledge from 17 experiences of which, 13 were related to conflict of interests, among them a) inflate and soft the investigations' results made to governmental institution or an organization for which you work as a researcher b) reviewing a friend's work or own, having to decline the revision. Other anecdotes known by researchers were c) don't report all financing sources, d) recommend reviewers' friends to journals, e) favoritism to provide financing research f) doing investigations by request, g) limit investigation's development by researchers or consolidated academic groups with power, h) copyright are only between student and thesis director, i) appropriation of colleagues' work, and j) modify results with something that didn't happen. Only four researchers mentioned have not either have had any anecdote at regard. Researchers' anecdotes about conflict of interests are shown in table 5.

Table 5. - Conflict of interests' experiences reported by researchers

Cases	Conflict of interests' analysis known by researchers.
1	Inflate the investigation's results to justify the existence of the research center
1	Soften the research's results a governmental institution
1	Find no approved results of an institution where only indicate the criterion used in the work
1	Evaluate your friend's work
1	Proofreading your own work
1	Don't report all financing sources
1	Recommend your friends like reviewers to journals
1	Favoritism to provide research's financing
1	Doing investigations by request
1	Limit the research's development by researchers and academic groups with power,
1	Authorship rights between student and thesis director
1	Appropriate of the colleagues' work
1	Modify results and shows something that didn't happen
4	Didn't have any anecdote to comment

Source: Own elaboration

Conclusion

Ethics is a lifestyle in any professional context. In scientific researches, the researcher has a commitment in every moment of the research process. Since the idea conception begins or approach issue until the development of the same, researcher must count with ethical principles to develop successfully all the decided research. For this reason, researchers who are absorbed in this experiences, have to improve their commitment more and more to develop research with all methodological and scientific rigor, but mostly ethics.

Based on obtained results, it could appreciate that researchers of social science field have knowledge about ethics means in publications, independently of responses given in interview. Most of them are agree with ethical and some of them coincided in their responses regard unacceptable or questionable plagiarism behavior, which has been present in some researchers of the own National System of Researchers (NSR) to whom their recognition was canceled by this embarrassing behavior. Also, researchers have known situations of favoritism in proofreading to some authors or institutions, or soften project's results of institutions to justify profits without obtaining efficient results and it constitutes to researcher a conflict.

However, everybody who is deeply committed in the research field must be conscious about ethical behavior represents, because a bad or good ethical behavior can have an effect for the rest of their lives. For this reason, it's important the development and applies of ethical principles in all research fields with a great diffusion from the research beginnings with the purpose to promote and improve good practices in future researchers because this is the example of principles to realize their researches which will be for benefit of society.

Regarding cases related with unacceptable and questionable ethical behavior in papers publication, researchers said have known 34 experiences, 27 about ethical lack in papers evaluation by editors or arbiters and 17 related with conflict of interests. As we can see researchers recognize to know ethical principles and they think it must survive in all scientific work, so they are agree to apply it in their scientific and academic production, however some of them coincided in their responses regard unacceptable or questionable plagiarism behavior, which has been present in some cases and they have known situations of favoritism in proofreading to some authors or institutions, or soften project's results of institutions to justify profits without obtaining efficient results and this misconduct constitutes a conflict to all researchers and educational institutions, not only from social sciences field.

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