What to do if you suspect redundant (duplicate) publication

(a) Suspected redundant publication in a submitted manuscript

Reviewer informs editor about redundant publication

- Thank reviewer and say you plan to investigate
- Get full documentary evidence if not already provided

Check degree of overlap/redundancy

- Major overlap/redundancy (i.e. based on same data with identical or very similar findings and/or evidence authors have sought to hide redundancy e.g. by changing title or author order or not citing previous papers)

  Contact corresponding author in writing, ideally enclosing signed authorship statement (or cover letter) stating that submitted work has not been published elsewhere and documentary evidence of duplication

  Author responds

    - Unsatisfactory explanation/admits guilt
    - Satisfactory explanation (honest error/journal instructions unclear/very junior researcher)

      Write to author (all authors if possible) rejecting submission, explaining position and expected future behaviour

      Consider informing author's superior and/or person responsible for research governance

      Inform author(s) of your action

    - No response

      Attempt to contact all other authors (check Medline/Google for emails)

      Contact author in neutral terms/expressing disappointment/explaining journal’s position

      Explain that secondary papers must refer to original

      Request missing reference to original and/or remove overlapping material

      Proceed with review

      Inform reviewer of outcome/action

      No response

      Contact author's institution requesting your concern is passed to author's superior and/or person responsible for research governance

      Try to obtain acknowledgement of your letter

      Write to author (all authors if possible) rejecting submission, explaining position and expected future behaviour

      If no response, keep contacting institution every 3–6 months

      Inform reviewer of outcome/action

- Minor overlap with some element of redundancy or legitimate re-analysis (e.g. sub-group/extended follow-up/discussion aimed at different audience)

  Contact author in neutral terms/expressing disappointment/explaining journal’s position

  Explain that secondary papers must refer to original

  Request missing reference to original and/or remove overlapping material

  Proceed with review

  Inform reviewer of outcome/action

- No significant overlap

  Discuss with reviewer

  Proceed with review

Note: The instructions to authors should state the journal’s policy on redundant publication.

Asking authors to sign a statement or tick a box may be helpful in subsequent investigations.

Note: ICMJE advises that translations are acceptable but MUST reference the original.

Developed for COPE by Liz Wager of Sideview (www.lizwager.com)
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