What to do if you suspect redundant (duplicate) publication

(b) Suspected redundant publication in a published manuscript

Reader informs editor about redundant publication

Thank reader 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 dataset with identical findings and/or evidence that authors have sought to hide redundancy, e.g. by changing title or author order or not referring to 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

No response

Inform reader of outcome/action

Unsatisfactory explanation/ admits guilt

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

Satisfactory explanation (honest error/journal instructions unclear/very junior researcher)

Consider publishing statement of redundant publication or retraction. Inform editor of other journal involved

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

Inform author(s) of your action

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

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

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

Explain that secondary papers must refer to original

Discuss publishing correction giving reference to original paper

Where editor has reason to believe failure to refer to previous paper(s) was deliberate, consider informing author's superior or person responsible for research governance

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
Editors may consider publishing a correction (i.e. the link to the original article) rather than a retraction/notice of duplicate publication in such cases

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