# Signs that might indicate authorship problems

Industry funded study with no

This may be legitimate, but may also mean deserving authors have been omitted; reviewing the original

Bear in mind this may be legitimate if author has used protocol may help determine the role of employees language editing services

Name on author list known to be from unrelated research area

This may indicate guest authorship

Unspecified role in acknowledgements

Individual thanked without a specific contribution

**Unfeasibly long** or short author list

For example, a simple case report with a dozen authors or a randomised trial with a single author

Questionable roles of contributors

For example, it appears that no one drafted the paper or analysed the data

> A similarity check shows work derived from a thesis where the original author is not on the author list or acknowledged

Corresponding author seems unable to respond to reviewers' comments

> Manuscript was drafted or revised by someone not on the author list or acknowledged

Check Word document properties or tracking or comment functions, but bear in mind that there may be an innocent explanation for this

> Tracking in manuscript shows that authors have been added or removed

Bear in mind there may be legitimate reasons for this

Impossibly prolific author

For example, a head of department as senior author

Authorship changes without notification during revision stages

Several similar articles have been published under different author names or aliases

This may be detected by an online search or plagiarism check

## Best practice to minimise authorship problems



Adopt policies that allow for transparency around who contributed to the submitted work and in what capacity

SUBMIT





Language quality in the

manuscript does not match

that of the cover letter

Signal of authors

problems

Facilitate awareness of emerging standards eg, ORCID and CRediT

**ENCOURAGE** 





Check for unusual patterns of behaviour which may suggest authorship problems

BEHAVIOUR



#### Authorship policies:

Clear policies (that allow for transparency around who contributed to the work and in what capacity) should be in place for requirements for authorship and contributorship as well as processes for managing potential disputes.

For further details see: publicationethics.org/authorship

### Relevant COPE Flowcharts and cases:

Flowchart: How to spot authorship problems.

https://doi.org/10.24318/cope.2019.2.16

Flowchart: Suspected ghost, guest, or gift authorship. https://doi.org/10.24318/cope.2019.2.18

Flowchart: Request for removal of author after publication. https://doi.org/10.24318/cope.2019.2.11

Flowchart: Systematic manipulation of the publication process. https://doi.org/10.24318/cope.2019.2.23

Case 17-15: Stolen article. https://cope.onl/case-stolen

Case 17-16: Authorship issues from disbanded consortium. https://cope.onl/case-authorship

Case 17-14: Withdrawal request by an author. https://cope.onl/case-withdraw

## **Further reading**

COPE Discussion document on best practice in theses publishing. https://doi.org/10.24318/LQU1h9US

COPE webinar 2017: Standards in authorship.

https://cope.onl/issues

eLearning module on authorship (members only).

https://cope.onl/elearn-author

Siu-wai Leung. Promoting awareness of good authorship practice. https://cope.onl/good-practice

Marušić A, Bošnjak L, Jerončić A, et al. A systematic review of research on the meaning, ethics and practices of authorship across scholarly disciplines. PLoS ONE 2011;6:e23477.

https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0023477 2

Master Z, Bryn Williams-Jones B. Publication practices in multidisciplinary teams: a closer look at authorship assignment and ranking. https://cope.onl/author-assign

McNutt MK, Bradford M, Drazen JM, et al. Transparency in authors' contributions and responsibilities to promote integrity in scientific publication. Proc Natl Acad Sci USA 2018;115:2557-60.

https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1715374115 [2]

Gøtzsche PC, Hróbjartsson A, Johansen HK, et al. Ghost authorship in industry-initiated randomised trials. PLoS Med 2007;4:e19. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.0040019

Wager E. Authors, ghosts, damned lies, and statisticians. PLoS Med 2007;4:e34.

https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.0040034 27

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publicationethics.org



Links to other sites are provided for your convenience but COPE accepts no responsibility or liability for the content of those sites.