

## Letter to the Editor

## Scientific misconduct and Iranian scientists

*Mala conducta científica y científicos iraníes*

To the Editor:

The quantity of researches and their equivalent outputs as articles has been increased in recent years. But the main concern in this regard is scientific misconduct. Especially in recent years, we witnessed an increasing number of retracted articles in various subjects.<sup>1</sup> Understanding the importance of this issue, we read and used the article entitled *Misconduct as the main cause for retraction. A descriptive study of retracted publications and their authors* with great interest. The authors investigate the retracted articles that were indexed in PubMed from 2013 to 2016 and tried to highlight the main causes of their retraction. After defining scientific misconduct in detail, they discussed the ways by which the scientific community can decrease these misconducts.<sup>2</sup>

One of the findings of the article is that “the highest proportion of retracted publications corresponded to Iran (15.52 per 10,000)”. Considering this, it’s concluded that “a possible explanation might also be less stringent control policies on the researchers’ publication track or a higher awareness of Editors due to other experiences with research coming from these countries in the past”.<sup>2</sup> Regarding this, it’s necessary to mention the following issues:

- According to the report of Springer Nature (the *Nature’s* publisher) on November 1, 2016, “58 articles authored by 282 Iran-based researchers were retracted today. . . 25 in *Tumour Biology* . . . 23 papers in *Diagnostic Pathology*”.<sup>3</sup> This shows that a considering part of Iran affiliated retracted papers (about 65%), has been retracted at the end of 2016, the last year of the investigated period in this article. (Deducting these articles, Iran’s retracted papers will be 5.05 per 10,000.) It’s obvious that these authors and the two mentioned journals cannot be a true representative for Iranian researchers. It should be taken into account that the authors of the article didn’t mention any reason for selection of this 4 year period (2013-2016) and any change in this period can change the results.
- Considering the events of scientific misconduct, serious legal action took place with all 282 authors who had fraud in the mentioned event including degradation in academic rankings and even expulsion from research centers. In addition to that, “the law on the prevention and confronting against fraud in scientific outcomes” announced to the universities by the president office of Iran in 2017.<sup>4</sup> Also, due to the fact that about half of these

articles were in medical fields, the National Research Ethics Committee of the Ministry of Health and Medical Education of Iran developed and announced mechanisms such as the guidelines to inform researches about scientific misconduct. In addition, this committee starts to empower the research ethics committees at universities in order to manage misconducts.<sup>5</sup> Regarding these activities, we hope in near future the scientific misconduct by Iranian researchers decreases significantly.

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Both authors have contributed to preparation and the final design of this manuscript.

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## Conflicts of interest

None.

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