

Publication Misconduct

A Brief Note — Definition, Types, and Significance

1. Definition

Publication misconduct refers to any deliberate act of deception, dishonesty, or breach of accepted ethical standards committed at any stage of scholarly research — conception, data collection, analysis, authorship, reporting, or peer review — that compromises the integrity, originality, or reliability of the published scientific or academic record. It is distinguished from honest error in that it involves an **intent to deceive** readers, reviewers, editors, or the wider scientific community.

Major bodies such as the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), the Office of Research Integrity (ORI, USA), and the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) treat fabrication, falsification, and plagiarism ("FFP") as the core forms of misconduct, while also recognising a wider set of questionable research and publication practices.

2. Types of Publication Misconduct

(a) Data-related misconduct

- **Fabrication** — inventing data, results, or entire experiments that were never actually performed.
- **Falsification** — manipulating research materials, equipment, or processes, or changing/omitting data or results so that the research is not accurately represented.
- **Image manipulation** — inappropriate alteration, duplication, or splicing of figures such as gel blots, micrographs, or clinical images.

(b) Plagiarism

- **Verbatim (direct) plagiarism** — copying another author's text, data, or ideas word-for-word without attribution.
- **Paraphrasing / mosaic plagiarism** — closely reproducing another's work with minor wording changes and no citation.
- **Self-plagiarism** — reusing one's own previously published text or data as if it were new, without disclosure.

(c) Authorship misconduct

- **Ghost authorship** — omitting a person who made a substantial contribution from the author list.
- **Guest / gift authorship** — including a person as an author despite no meaningful contribution, often for seniority or reciprocity.
- **Authorship disputes** — unjustified allocation or ordering of credit among genuine contributors.

(d) Publication-related misconduct

- **Duplicate / redundant publication** — publishing substantially the same data or findings in more than one journal without disclosure.
- **Salami slicing** — splitting one coherent study into multiple "least publishable units" to inflate publication count.
- **Citation manipulation** — excessive self-citation or coercive citation demanded by reviewers/editors to boost metrics.

(e) Peer-review misconduct

- **Breach of confidentiality** — reviewers or editors misusing or disclosing unpublished manuscript content.
- **Manipulated / fake peer review** — authors suggesting fabricated reviewer identities or reviewer rings to secure favourable review.

(f) Conflict of interest

- **Undisclosed conflicts** — financial, personal, or institutional interests that could bias the research or its reporting are not declared.

3. Significance of Addressing Publication Misconduct

- **Scientific integrity:** keeps the published record trustworthy, reproducible, and free of deliberately false claims.
- **Efficient use of resources:** prevents other researchers and funders from wasting time and money pursuing leads built on fabricated or falsified data.
- **Public and patient safety:** is critical in fields such as medicine and engineering, where false results can directly endanger lives if acted upon.
- **Public trust in science:** sustained trust in institutions, journals, and evidence-based policymaking depends on visible research integrity.
- **Fair credit and career equity:** ensures that recognition, funding, and promotion are based on genuine contribution rather than manipulation.
- **Institutional and legal accountability:** misconduct exposes authors and institutions to retraction, funding withdrawal, legal action, and reputational damage.

4. Flowchart — Types, Detection, and Significance

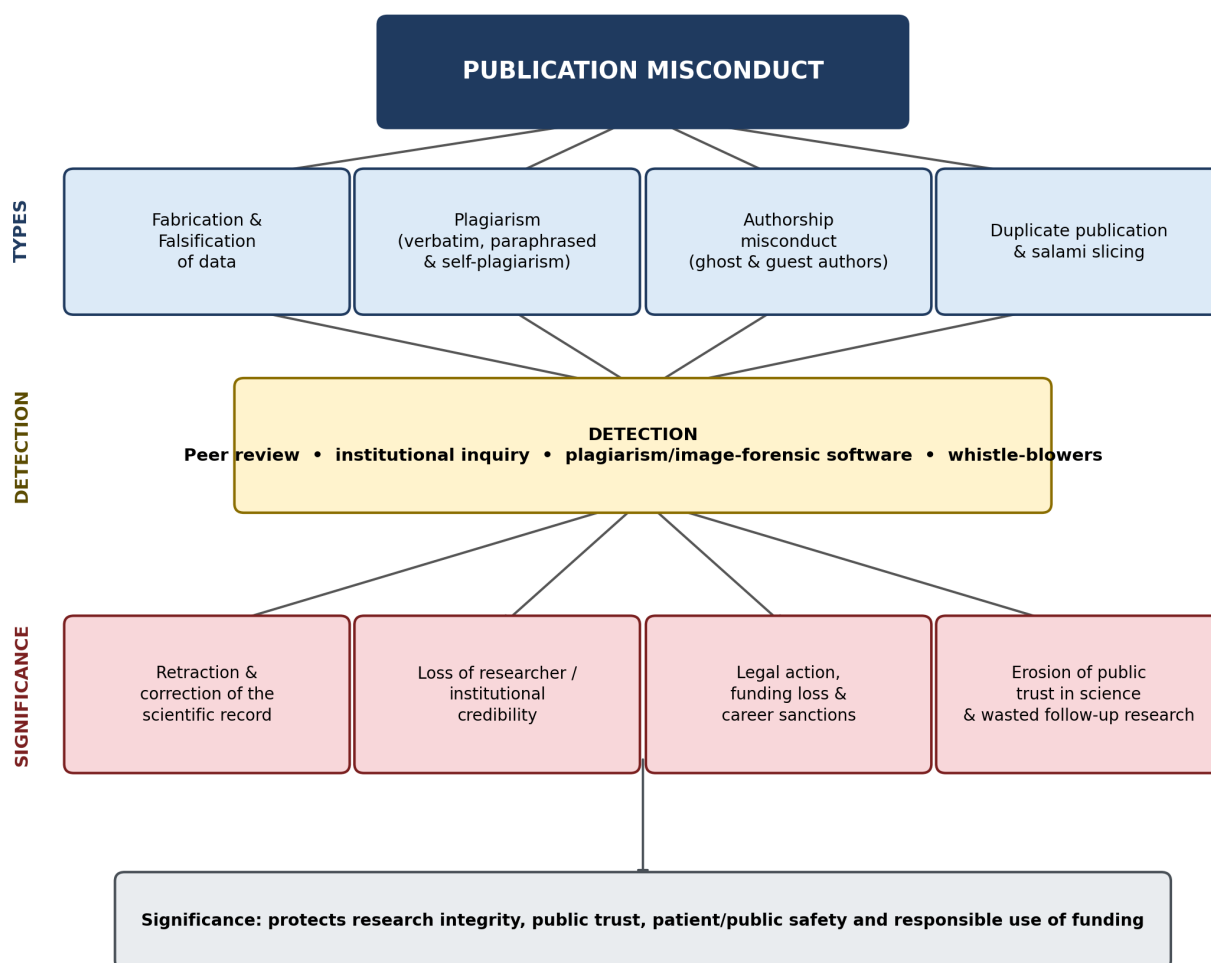


Fig. 1: How the major types of publication misconduct are identified through detection mechanisms, and the resulting consequences that underline its significance.