

RESEARCH INTEGRITY – WHERE ARE WE?

What is Ethics? The definition of ethics revolves around the concept of morality. Ethics is defined as a set of moral principles that govern a person's actions. Or as the philosophy of morality. Or as the discipline that defines, guides, or describes what is good and bad, right and wrong.

We may ask ourselves: is ethics of scientific research a science itself? Probably not. Ethics of scientific research refers to the guidelines that define or describe a *responsible conduct of research*. If we ask for random individuals to tell examples of violations of integrity or research ethics, the most common answers will certainly be: plagiarism and data manipulation. These are, as we all know, the most feared ethic violations that can affect the work of a researcher and can even lead to the end of his career.

The issues of ethics and the integrity of research, a more recently introduced term, are in fact issues of greater finesse than these clear and indisputable violations of any system of moral and ethical values. The academic community has focused over the past two decades on many issues of ethics and integrity. Many of the world's states have set up institutions or departments exclusively responsible to study, define and judge ethical issues. In Europe, the first such institute was set up in Finland in 1996, where the first national guide on scientific integrity was drafted.

At the same time, on global level, it became clear that there is a need for guidelines and statements to define and standardize, regardless of regional culture and practice, the academic research and publication activities from the point of view of integrity. Therefore, guidelines such as the Helsinki Declaration, the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity, the Montreal Statement on Research Integrity, and the Singapore Statement on Research Integrity have been issued.

In 2012, the DORA Declaration was written and signed until today by more than 14,000 researchers and over 1400 institutions. The general recommendation of this statement is: "*Do not use journal-based metrics, such as Journal Impact Factors, as a substitute measure of the quality of individual research articles, to assess individual contributions, or to hiring, promoting, or funding decisions*"¹

¹ San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA)

This year, I was honored to attend at the 6th edition of The World Conference of Research Integrity, which took place in Hong Kong in early June and gathered participants from all over the world. The statement made on this occasion is titled: The Hong Kong Manifesto for Assessing Researchers: Fostering Research Integrity. It discusses one of the most current issues in research: assessing researchers and their outcomes. This manifesto proposes 5 principles accompanied by references for each and implementation suggestions. These five principles are:

1. *Assess researchers based on responsible practices in all aspects of the research enterprise*
2. *Value the reporting of all research, regardless of the results and reward honest and transparent reporting*
3. *Value the practice of open science*
4. *Value and broad range of research activities, such as innovation, replication, synthesis, and meta-research*
5. *Value and range of other contributions to research, such as peer review for grants and publications, and mentoring²*

In Romania, in 2016, a number of minimal criteria for academic promotion have been proposed that have become mandatory since 2017. For the field of medicine, the minimum criteria only take into account the publishing activity from the *SCIE* database of the *Web of Science* (*Clarivate Analytics*) and are based on the hirsch index, the cumulative impact factor and the total number of published articles. Thus, we can observe that in Romania, as in many other countries of the world, the minimum criteria violate both the recommendations of the *DORA Declaration* and the *Hong Kong Manifesto*, being based on quantitative metrics or metrics that are not intended for the assessment of researchers and taking into account only a small sector of a researcher's entire scientific activity.

In conclusion, the latest trends in integrity research focuses on the transparency and objectivity of the process of evaluating both researchers and research. There is a global care for the objectivity of academic evaluation and promotion processes, the rational use of scientometric parameters as well as for the evaluation of the quality of research and its impact both at scientific and social levels.

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² The Hong Kong Manifesto for Assessing Researchers: Fostering Research Integrity, 2019