COPE research findings on publication ethics for arts, humanities, and social sciences

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Dr GAVIN SWANSON

COPE Council Member
Summary of COPE

• Conceived in 1997
• Now >12,500 journal members (3,960 AHSS) worldwide
• Advisory, education, support: non-statutory
• Remote team of staff + council members and Trustees based internationally
• Council and Trustees: academic editors, publishers, scholarly publishing services
• Flowcharts, guidance, eLearning, Forum, seminars
• Members can bring cases to COPE council via Forums for advice
COPE - % of member journals by subject

- AHSS: 32%
- Medicine: 25%
- Life Sciences: 13%
- Engineering & Technology: 6%
- Computer Science: 5%
- Physics: 4%
- Dentistry, Nursing, Allied Health and Veterinary Science: 3%
- Earth Science: 3%
- Environmental Science: 3%
- Mathematics and Statistics: 3%
- Chemistry: 0%
COPE - % AHSS member journals by subject

- Psychology, Social and Behavioural Science: 30%
- Economics, Finance, Business and Industry: 29%
- Art and Humanities: 23%
- Education: 11%
- Law: 5%
- Geography: 2%
COPE’s Most Popular Resources

Page Views on COPE website 1 Jan – 31 Dec 2018

Authorship and contribution 14,733
Allegations of misconduct 9,946
Resources/guidelines-new/cope-ethical-guidelines-peer-reviewers 6,856
Case/paper-submitted-publication-without-consent-or-knowledge-co-authors 6,497
Resources/guidelines-new/principles-transparency-and-best-practice-scholarly-publishing 6,272
Resources/text-recycling-guidelines 6,107

Core practices // Individual resources // COPE cases
Details of the survey

- Two online focus groups ($n = 10$ respondents)
- E-survey ($n = 656$ responses, 463 COPE members)
- 83% voluntary EiCs, 13% employed Eds
- 5% < 12 months experience, 29% > 11 years
- 37% USA, 21% UK, 17% EU, 9% Australia + NZ, 4% Asia, 4% Canada, 4% C and S. America
Awareness of COPE and what resources are offered (1)

- 28% unaware of COPE
- 27% low awareness
- 21% medium awareness
- 33% high awareness (73% of current COPE members)
Awareness of COPE and what resources are offered (2)

• 36% of Humanities and 44% specifically in History were unaware

• Almost half had medium awareness – of those many were unaware of some resources, including Forum, Flowcharts, Guidelines, Cases

• High awareness tended to be editors with long experience, considering Forum, Flowcharts, Guidelines, Cases to be extremely useful

• Those that knew COPE well better perceived it as more relevant, with COPE members considering it highly relevant
Misperceptions of what COPE does

Of those with medium or high awareness of COPE they were asked to summarise what COPE did.

- ‘Offered guidelines and support’, but not ‘education’
- ‘Publication ethics’, but no specific actions or issues related to those
- Some assumed COPE adjudicated on issues, rather than offering suggestions
- Some thought COPE had regulatory or statutory powers, including setting policy
- Many didn’t actually know what COPE did
- *What COPE actually does is...*
Relevance of editor, editorial board, publisher and COPE as sources of support

• Editorial colleagues, editorial boards, publisher contacts (especially known individuals) were considered somewhat or extremely important sources by >80%

• Professional bodies, society officers, ethics committees and COPE were considered somewhat or extremely important sources by 40 – 60%

• When COPE was not mentioned it tended to be because of a lack of awareness that COPE was a potential source of support
Common issues of publication ethics

- Language and writing-quality, while remaining inclusive
- Plagiarism, including self-plagiarism
- Bias in reviewer comments
- Managing complaints and appeals
- IP and copyright
- Fraudulent submissions
- Data and/or image fabrication

^ Most widespread
# Least confident in dealing with
* Most serious
Authorship and attribution

- Plagiarism – 58%, Self-plagiarism - >50% (esp. Business, Finance, Economics)
- ‘Caused by need to publish or perish’, leading to ‘salami-slicing’
- Possibly prevents submission of thesis-based papers
Submissions and data

- 44% felt fraudulent submissions among most serious issues
- 24% felt lack of confidence in dealing with it
- 31% felt data / image fabrication also serious
- 24% felt lack of confidence in dealing with it
Conclusions and Recommendations (1)

**Strengths**
COPE is respected by those who know it.
Guidelines and flow charts extremely useful.
Aware of importance of ethical issues in general and committed to addressing them.

**Weaknesses**
Knowledge of COPE is not universal – 28% unaware.
Misconceptions of what COPE does – NO statutory or sanction powers.
Other resources not widely known or appreciated.
Personalisation of resources might increase awareness and usefulness for AHSS editors.
Conclusions and Recommendations (2)

Opportunities
Enhance awareness, especially for specific publishers and in the USA.

COPE could offer education and support where this is not provided by publishers (generally, smaller publishers or those with less experience of ethical issues).

AHSS editors would appreciate more support around mentoring authors, mediating between conflicting interests and moderating authorship standards.

Personalisation of resources might increase awareness and usefulness for AHSS editors.
THANK YOU

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