

Assessment of Knowledge, Attitude and Practice in Medical Postgraduate Students and Medical Teachers Regarding Plagiarism

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ABSTRACT

INTRODUCTION: Plagiarism had become a growing concern in medical research due to the easy access to digital information. The students are the least experienced and therefore they are most likely to commit plagiarism unintentionally. For this reason, the study regarding this has been done by various scientist abroad, although in India research in this area is very less. Keeping this in mind, the present project was carried out to assess the knowledge, attitude and practice of medical postgraduate students and faculty members in plagiarism.

MATERIAL & METHOD: An observational cross-sectional study was conducted from October 2018 to April 2019 among 280 participants—140 postgraduate students and 140 faculty members—selected by simple random sampling. A validated questionnaire comprising 24 items on knowledge, attitude, and practices of plagiarism was administered using a five-point Likert scale. Data were entered in Microsoft Excel and analysed using the Chi-square test to compare responses between the two groups.

RESULT: Over 60% of participants were aware that using another's work without acknowledgment constituted plagiarism. Faculty members demonstrated higher knowledge levels than students ($p < 0.001$). Regarding attitude, 60% of students incorrectly considered modifying images as acceptable, whereas 42% of faculty correctly identified it as plagiarism ($p < 0.001$). For practice, 60% of students admitted plagiarizing occasionally due to short deadlines, while 42% of faculty claimed they never did ($p < 0.001$).

DISCUSSION: Students often justified plagiarism due to pressure or lack of writing skills, while faculty showed occasional misconceptions. Although both groups had moderate knowledge, gaps persisted between awareness and ethical conduct. These findings aligned with previous research, indicating a need for continued ethical sensitization and institutional oversight.

CONCLUSION: Both faculty and students required regular training, workshops, and strict anti-plagiarism policies to strengthen ethical research behavior and uphold academic integrity.

Keywords: Plagiarism, Knowledge, Attitude, Practice, Medical Postgraduates, Faculty Members, Research Ethics, Academic Integrity.

INTRODUCTION

In this modern era of medical education, with the increase use and easy availability of internet has facilitated the copying of people's works or ideas. Medical research has a major role in patient's management and so it is crucial to be conducted correctly. According to the Merriam Webster Online Dictionary, Plagiarism means: to steal and pass off the ideas or words of another's production as one's own without crediting the source. [1] In other words plagiarism is considered as an act of 'fraud'. [2] Among all types of misconduct in science and in an academic environment, plagiarism is considered to be the most vicious between peers, because it constitutes theft of intellectual property, which is the core achievement of intellectual work.

However, increased use of software may also cause students to use various ways of plagiarism like paying others to write. [3] There is difference in the views and definition of plagiarism in teachers and students. [4]

Paraphrasing only the words of an original source is not sufficient to prevent plagiarism. One must properly credit to the source when borrowing someone else's original idea or work. In recent years, plagiarism has been focussing of special attention of many academic and scientific communities. Various reasons can be ascribed for indulging in plagiarism including a fiercely competitive academic surrounding, impossible deadlines, lack of proficiency in English in non-English speaking countries, social benefits and lack of respect for intellectual property are among most important reason. [5,6]

The students are the least experienced and therefore they are most likely to commit plagiarism unintentionally. For this reason, the study regarding this has been done by various scientist abroad, although in India, research in this area is very less. Keeping this in mind, the present project was carried out to assess the knowledge, attitude and practice of medical postgraduate students and faculty members in plagiarism.

MATERIALS & METHODS

This study was carried out in one of the government medical colleges of central India from October 2018 to April 2019 (6 months) in order to assess the knowledge, attitude and practicing of plagiarism in post graduate students and faculty members. It is observational cross-sectional study. Total study population was 280. The study population were 140 post graduate students and 140 faculty members who voluntarily involved in the study. The consent of the participant was taken. The participants were selected by simple random sampling method. Only those faculty members who have published at least one paper were enrolled. It is approved by Institutional Ethical committee.

A questionnaire was designed to assess the knowledge, attitude and practice of plagiarism in the postgraduate students and in faculty members by literature search and focus group discussion. Validity and reliability tests were carried out for the questionnaire.

Prior to administrating the questionnaire, the students were addressed regarding the purpose and process of data collection. They were informed that data collected from them will be unnamed and their participation will be voluntary. The questionnaire consisting of 24 detailed questions, was developed to assess the knowledge, attitude and practices of the participants about plagiarism. It was designed by following prior study to collect information regarding knowledge, attitude and practices towards plagiarism. [7,8] It consists of three parts, first part contains knowledge factors, second part contains attitude and third part contains practices of plagiarism. All questions were marked in five-point Likert scale. Data were entered in Microsoft Excel and analyzed using the **Chi-square test** to compare responses between the two groups.

RESULT

Table No.1 showing comparison of statement of knowledge between Student and Faculty.

STATEMENTS	GROUP	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	UNDECIDED	P-VALUE
1. Turning in someone else's work as your own is plagiarism.	Student	92	35	4	5	4	<0.001, HS
	Faculty	42	80	4	0	19	
2. Using parts or the whole of a text written by another person without acknowledgement is plagiarism.	Student	68	59	6	6	1	<0.001, HS
	Faculty	37	79	10	11	7	
3. Failing to put a quotation in quotation marks is plagiarism	Student	60	57	11	6	6	0.004, HS
	Faculty	64	33	23	10	15	
4. Giving correct information about the source of a quotation is plagiarism	Student	31	8	30	56	5	<0.001, HS
	Faculty	8	7	57	67	5	
5. Changing words and copying the sentences without giving credit to source is plagiarism	Student	76	35	21	5	3	<0.001, HS
	Faculty	61	52	7	14	11	
6. Plagiarism is as bad as stealing an exam.	Student	32	69	18	4	2	0.036, S
	Faculty	54	73	8	4	6	

HS: Highly significant, S: Significant, NS: Not Significant

Table 2: Showing Comparison of statement attitude between student and faculty

STATEMENTS	GROUP	THIS IS CHEATING BUT NOT PLAGIARISM	NO IDEA	THIS IS PLAGIARISM	P-VALUE
1. I use a picture from article, I made some changes, and write that I have modified it from reference.	Student	85	9	41	<0.001, HS
	Faculty	53	32	59	
2. I copy and paste picture from books or the internet without citing source.	Student	32	9	101	<0.001, HS
	Faculty	23	39	82	
3. I copy text from someone else article without acknowledging him and write in my own words.	Student	26	49	60	<0.001, HS
	Faculty	49	13	83	
4. I asked someone to write article for me and paid for that.	Student	69	14	51	0.568, NS
	Faculty	68	19	63	
5. I used some data of my previous work without a reference.	Student	45	16	78	0.002, HS
	Faculty	33	40	73	
6. I used ideas or words of someone else and passed them off as one's own.	Student	19	24	99	0.196, NS
	Faculty	30	27	88	
7. If a colleague of mine allows me to copy from his article. I am not doing anything bad, because I have his permission.	Student	33	38	69	0.035, S
	Faculty	54	29	61	

HS: Highly significant, S: Significant, NS: Not Significant

Table 3: comparison of statement of practices between student and faculty

STATEMENTS	GROUP	SOMETIMES	ALWAYS	VERY OFTEN	RARELY	NEVER	P-VALUE
1. It is my right to plagiarize a bit because of short deadline given to me.	Student	85	7	5	5	38	<0.001, HS
	Faculty	42	12	12	19	60	
2. I am tempted to plagiarize because everyone else is doing it.	Student	54	19	8	18	36	0.039, S
	Faculty	49	11	12	19	65	
3. I copy a sentence which inspires me for further writing.	Student	62	17	23	9	35	0.003, HS
	Faculty	33	22	22	16	52	
4. I copy and paste pictures and sentences because currently I have more important tasks to do.	Student	41	8	35	30	19	<0.001, HS
	Faculty	15	12	23	29	65	
5. I could not write a scientific paper without plagiarizing	Student	69	9	21	25	20	<0.001, HS
	Faculty	20	17	18	24	69	
6. Only some part is taken because, I don't know how to write in scientific language	Student	36	16	55	16	15	<0.001, HS
	Faculty	30	12	17	33	53	
7. It is really convenient to copy and paste from internet	Student	67	6	13	34	17	<0.001, HS
	Faculty	38	14	14	27	52	
8. I am not competent in academic writing	Student	24	9	26	56	31	<0.001, HS
	Faculty	31	15	11	20	68	
9. I practice it because, people who plagiarize have not been caught yet.	Student	19	18	3	13	86	0.010, S
	Faculty	10	5	2	13	110	
10. Those who say, they have never plagiarized are lying.	Student	31	60	9	10	30	0.007, HS
	Faculty	30	41	25	4	35	
11. I buy a paper from someone or from internet and present as my own work.	Student	40	8	3	14	73	<0.001, HS
	Faculty	6	0	3	10	116	

HS: Highly significant, S: Significant, NS: Not Significant

DISCUSSION

Plagiarism constitutes the use and misrepresentation of another person's thoughts, word or ideas. Unfortunately, plagiarism has become easier and more prevalent in recent years due to the widespread use of computers and easy access to multiple information resources via the internet.^[9] It has become an important issue in many countries. In recent years, most of the faculty members all over the world are involved in research. They lead a project or participate in scientific writing of an article. However, it is not clear if they are familiar with scientific misconduct issues such as plagiarism or not. Also, the post graduate students become actively involved in patient care. Unfortunately, participating in acts of plagiarism as student may negatively affect their medical knowledge and clinical skills, resulting in unskilled professionals treating the patients.

In this survey, the knowledge, attitude and practices of plagiarism was assessed using questionnaire containing 24 different statements.

The first part of questionnaire contains the different statements to assess the knowledge of participants. About 65% of the students agreed and 57% of faculty members strongly agreed to the first statement. When both the groups were compared it was statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). When the second and third statements were compared, there was significant difference in both the groups. About 47% post graduate students and 67% faculty members strongly disagreed to the statement "Giving correct information about the source of a quotation is plagiarism" and when compared it was found to be highly significant ($p < 0.001$). Both the group strongly agreed to "Plagiarism is as bad as stealing examination". Answers to our questionnaire revealed that more than half of the respondents have better knowledge of plagiarism. But Shirazi B et. al.^[10] observed that most of the respondents lack the knowledge of plagiarism.

Attitudes towards different scenarios were judged by giving the participants a number of cases and asking them to judge whether each case is constituted plagiarism or cheating but not plagiarism. This is shown in table no.2. About 42% of faculty members answered to the first scenario that it is plagiarism while 60% students said it is cheating not plagiarism. When both the groups were compared it was statistically significant. Almost half of both the respondents answered to the second and third scenario that this is plagiarism. For some additional questions, there were differences as to whether something was considered plagiarism or cheating and more than half of them answered it was as plagiarism. Although survey found the differences in both the groups, which is in accordance with earlier studies.^[4,11,12]

In the current study, we placed the different scenarios to know the different ways of practicing of plagiarism. Nearly 60% of the students responded that sometimes they plagiarize because short deadlines given to them but 42% of faculty members said they never. When both the groups were compared it was statistically significant. In most of the scenarios of the statements of practices there were differences in the opinion of the students and faculty members. Almost one third of the post graduate students answered that sometimes they tempted to plagiarize because others are doing, inspiration for further writing and they have more important task to do. While one third faculty members answered as that 'they never practice plagiarism' as answer to these scenarios. About 42% of the students and 29% of faculty members responded 'Always' to the situation 'those who say, they have never plagiarized are lying'. It was statistically significant.

In the current study, students reported the main reason for plagiarism to be short deadlines, everyone is plagiarizing, writing for further inspiration etc. Similar study was done by Kameran et al. and Johanna F Lindahl.^[13,14]

Overall, reducing plagiarism and creating an ethical educational environment will result in post graduate students and faculty members developing better learning, research, writing skills and above all the best treating doctors. Academic institutions should arrange necessary training, support regarding how to conduct appropriate research, search for high quality sources and prevent plagiarism. Further study is required to evaluate the effectiveness of anti-plagiarism interventions and strategies.

CONCLUSION

In this study we assessed the knowledge, attitude and practices of plagiarism in post graduate students and faculty members. More than half of the respondents have knowledge of plagiarism. There was difference in the attitude and practicing of plagiarism of post graduate students and faculty members. This indicates a need for more thorough training at different stages of carrier and discussion among faculty. So, there is need for effective policies and procedures to be implemented to increase awareness of plagiarism thereby reducing the incidence of academic dishonesty. Overall conclusion of our study is that these topics should be more frequently addressed and discussed. Anti-plagiarism measures should be taken by institution.

Declaration by Authors

Ethical Approval: Approved

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