

Editorial

Peer review fraud - it's not big and it's not clever

¹Shamima Rahman, ²Matthias R. Baumgartner, ^{3,4}Eva Morava, ⁵Marc Patterson, ⁶Verena Peters, ⁷Johannes Zschocke

¹Mitochondrial Research Group, Genetics and Genomic Medicine, UCL Institute of Child Health, and Metabolic Department, Great Ormond Street Hospital, London, UK

²Division of Metabolism and Children's Research Center, University Children's Hospital, Zürich, Switzerland

Departments of Pediatrics, ³Tulane University Medical School, New Orleans, USA and ⁴University Medical School of Leuven, Leuven, Belgium

⁵Division of Child and Adolescent Neurology, Departments of Neurology, Pediatrics and Medical Genetics Mayo Clinic Children's Center, Rochester, MN, USA

⁶Centre for Paediatric and Adolescence Medicine, University of Heidelberg, Germany

⁷Division of Human Genetics, Medical University Innsbruck, Innsbruck, Austria

Authors' Contributions

Shamima Rahman: designed and wrote the manuscript

Matthias R. Baumgartner: critical reading and revision

Eva Morava: critical reading and revisio

Marc Patterson: critical reading and revision

Verena Peters: critical reading and revision

Johannes Zschocke: critical reading and revision

Compliance with the Ethical guidelines

All authors were compliant and followed the ethical guidelines, according to the requirements of JIMD

Conflict of Interest

Shamima Rahman, Matthias R. Baumgartner, Eva Morava, Marc Patterson, Verena Peters and Johannes Zschocke declare that they have no conflict of interest.

'You are only as good as your last paper' is a truism often quoted in academic circles, and the attendant pressures to publish prolifically and rapidly in high impact journals can be overwhelming. We are aware of an extremely concerning trend towards peer review fraud [1,2]. In recent months several publishing houses have retracted published articles after fraudulent reviews were discovered [3,4]. So far these crimes appear to have been perpetrated by a very small minority of authors who have defrauded the peer review system to obtain favourable peer reviews. More concerning are agencies who not only provide a writing service for authors but also, once the manuscripts have been submitted, create fake reviewer identities to write positive reviews for these same manuscripts.

What are the Editorial Team at JIMD doing to guard against peer review fraud? We would like to reassure our readers, authors and reviewers that we have robust procedures in place. We have a three tier review system, with an initial editorial screen followed by communicating editor assessment plus formal peer reviews, and then a final overview of the reviews by the Editorial Team. In this extensive review process, an overly positive review of a manuscript should be flagged as an 'outlier' warranting closer examination. We work in a small field where most experts are known to each other. Our board of communicating editors are selected carefully and all known to us as experts in their fields. These communicating editors appoint reviewers known to them who are also experts. We avoid using reviewers recommended by authors, but in those rare instances where we do use authors' suggested reviewers, we use email addresses that have been independently entered into our editorial manager system, to avoid the inadvertent use of false email addresses. All manuscripts undergo checks to identify any financial or other conflicts of interest and to ensure compliance with ethical standards [5].

Although we have never retracted a JIMD paper because of fraudulent peer reviews, we will not be complacent but remain vigilant to attempts to hack our peer review process. We strongly disapprove of peer review fraud and will take severe measures if we discover it [6].

[1] Haug CJ. Peer-Review Fraud - Hacking the Scientific Publication Process. *N Engl J Med*. 2015 Oct 21. [Epub ahead of print] PubMed PMID: 26488392.

[2] Ferguson C, Marcus A, Oransky I. Publishing: The peer-review scam. *Nature*. 2014 Nov 27;515(7528):480-2. doi: 10.1038/515480a. PubMed PMID: 25428481.

[3] Hindawi concludes an in-depth investigation into peer review fraud. Hindawi Publishing, July 8, 2015 (<http://www.hindawi.com/statement/>).

[4] McCook A. 64 More papers retracted for fake reviews, this time from Springer journals. *Retraction Watch* (<http://retractionwatch.com/2015/08/17/64-more-papers-retracted-for-fake-reviews-this-time-from-springer-journals/>).

[5] <https://www.springer.com/de/partners/society-zone-issues/springer-s-guide-publishing-ethics-for-journals/15064>.

[6] Freckelton I. Criminalising research fraud. *J Law Med*. 2014 Dec;22(2):241-54. PubMed PMID: 25715528.