

COMPLAINT POLICY

Aligned with COPE Code of Conduct, Best Practice Guidelines for Journal Editors & PMDC Standards

Effective: 2025 | Version 1.0

1. PURPOSE

The Journal of Bashir Institute of Health Sciences (JBIHS) is committed to maintaining the highest ethical and professional standards across all aspects of its publication process. This policy establishes a clear, fair, transparent, and timely procedure for receiving, investigating, and resolving complaints from any party involved in or affected by the journal's editorial, peer review, or publication activities.

JBIHS handles all complaints in accordance with the COPE Code of Conduct and Best Practice Guidelines for Journal Editors, and in alignment with PMDC journal recognition requirements.

2. SCOPE

2.1 Who May Raise a Complaint

This policy applies to complaints submitted by any of the following:

- Authors (corresponding or co-authors)
- Peer reviewers
- Readers or subscribers
- Editorial board members
- Any other institutional or individual stakeholder

2.2 What Complaints Are Covered

Complaints may relate to, but are not limited to:

- Editorial decisions, undue delays, or lack of communication
- Peer review quality, bias, or inappropriate conduct by a reviewer
- Alleged research or publication misconduct (e.g., plagiarism, fabrication, duplicate publication)
- Breach of confidentiality during the review process
- Conflicts of interest not declared by editors or reviewers
- Mismanagement of publication ethics
- Violations of JBIHS journal policies or COPE guidelines

3. COMPLAINT SUBMISSION

3.1 How to Submit

All complaints must be submitted in writing by email to the Editorial Office. Verbal or informal complaints will be directed to this process.

Submit complaints to:

Editor-in-Chief, Journal of Bashir Institute of Health Sciences

Email: editor.in.chief@bashir.edu.pk

Subject line: JBIHS Formal Complaint — [brief description]

3.2 Required Information

The complaint submission must include:

- Full name, institutional affiliation, and contact details of the complainant
- A clear and detailed description of the complaint
- Relevant dates (date of incident, submission, decision, etc.)
- Supporting evidence or documentation (correspondence, manuscript ID, reviewer comments, etc.)
- Any prior communications with JBIHS related to the matter

3.3 Anonymous Complaints

Anonymous complaints will be considered only where sufficient documentary evidence is provided to allow a meaningful investigation. In line with HEC policy, the journal encourages complainants to identify themselves. Identified complainants will receive formal acknowledgement and updates on the outcome.

4. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Upon receipt of a written complaint, the Editorial Office will:

- Send a formal written acknowledgement within 7 working days.
- Assign a reference number to the complaint for tracking purposes.
- Inform the complainant of the expected timeline and next steps.

5. REVIEW & INVESTIGATION

5.1 Initial Assessment

The Editor-in-Chief, or a designated senior member of the editorial team, will conduct an initial review of the complaint within 14 working days to determine whether it falls within scope and whether sufficient information has been provided to proceed.

5.2 Full Investigation

Where the complaint requires a full investigation:

- All relevant parties will be contacted and given an opportunity to respond.
- All relevant evidence, correspondence, and documentation will be collected.
- COPE flowcharts and guidelines will be consulted for complex ethical matters.
- The investigation will be completed within 4–6 weeks, depending on the complexity of the matter.

5.3 Complaints Involving the Editor-in-Chief

If the complaint involves the Editor-in-Chief directly, the matter will be escalated to and handled by the Publisher or the Advisory Board of JBIHS, to ensure full impartiality. The Editor-in-Chief will have no involvement in the investigation or decision-making.

COPE Principle: *Editors must not be involved in decisions about their own submissions or complaints directly concerning their conduct. JBIHS follows this principle in accordance with COPE's Core Practices on Editorial Independence.*

6. RESOLUTION

Upon conclusion of the investigation, the Editor-in-Chief (or the investigating body) will determine the appropriate outcome. Possible resolutions include:

Complaint Policy

- A formal written explanation or clarification to the complainant
- Correction, corrigendum, or retraction notice published in the journal
- Revision or reversal of an editorial decision
- A formal apology to the affected party
- Disciplinary action against an editor, reviewer, or author where misconduct is confirmed
- Referral to PMDC, HEC, or the author's institution if the matter warrants external action

The decision and the reasoning behind it will be communicated in writing to the complainant within 2 working days of the conclusion of the investigation.

7. APPEALS

If the complainant is not satisfied with the resolution, a formal written appeal may be submitted within 14 calendar days of receiving the decision. The appeal must state clearly the grounds for disagreement with the decision and include any new evidence not previously considered.

The appeal will be reviewed by an independent member of the Editorial Board or Advisory Board who was not involved in the original investigation. Their decision will be final and communicated within 4 weeks of receiving the appeal. No further appeal will be entertained after this stage.

8. TIMELINE SUMMARY

Stage	Timeframe	Responsible Party
Acknowledgement of complaint	Within 7 working days	Editor-in-Chief / Editorial Office
Initial assessment	Within 14 working days	Editor-in-Chief or designee
Full investigation	4–6 weeks	Editorial / Advisory Board
Decision communicated	Within 2 working days of decision	Editor-in-Chief
Appeal submission deadline	Within 14 days of decision	Complainant
Appeal review & final decision	Within 4 weeks of appeal	Independent Board Member

9. CONFIDENTIALITY

All complaints, related correspondence, evidence, and deliberations will be treated with strict confidentiality throughout the process. Information will be disclosed only to those directly involved in the investigation, and only to the extent necessary to conduct a fair and thorough review. Confidentiality will be maintained in accordance with applicable legal and ethical standards.

Where a complaint is found to be malicious, vexatious, or submitted in bad faith, JBIHS reserves the right to take appropriate action against the complainant.

10. REFERENCE TO COPE

JBIHS adheres to the COPE Code of Conduct and Best Practice Guidelines for Journal Editors. In cases involving complex or novel ethical issues that cannot be resolved internally, the journal may seek guidance

from COPE. The COPE flowcharts for handling complaints, misconduct, and authorship disputes are available at www.publicationethics.org and are followed by the editorial team.

11. POLICY REVIEW

This policy will be reviewed at a minimum every two years, or sooner in response to updates in COPE guidelines, PMDC regulations, or HEC requirements. The current version will be available on the JBIHS journal website. All stakeholders are encouraged to familiarise themselves with this policy before submitting a complaint.

*For all complaints and queries, contact the Editorial Office — Bashir Institute of Health Sciences, Pakistan |
editor.in.chief@bashir.edu.pk*