PUBLICATION ETHICS POLICY

Aligned with PMDC Regulations, HEC Anti-Plagiarism Policy 2023, ICMJE & COPE

Effective: 2025 | Version 1.0

1. PREAMBLE

The Journal of Bashir Institute of Health Sciences (JBIHS) is dedicated to upholding the highest standards of research integrity and ethical publishing. This policy applies to all parties in the publication process — authors, reviewers, and editors — and is governed by the following frameworks:

- Pakistan Medical & Dental Council (PMDC) — regulations for recognized health sciences journals and professional code of conduct.
- Higher Education Commission (HEC) Pakistan — Anti-Plagiarism Policy Version 2.0 (2023) and Graduate Education Policy 2023.
- International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) — Recommendations for the Conduct, Reporting, Editing and Publication of Scholarly Work in Medical Journals.
- Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) — Core Practices and misconduct flowcharts.
- Declaration of Helsinki (1975, revised 2013) — Ethical principles for medical research involving human subjects.

2. ETHICAL APPROVAL & INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW

2.1 Mandatory Requirement

All original research involving human participants, human data, human tissues, or animal subjects must have received prospective approval from a recognized Institutional Review Board (IRB) or Ethical Review Committee (ERC) before the study commenced. Retrospective ethical approval is not acceptable.

2.2 What Must Be Stated in the Manuscript

- Name of the ethics committee or IRB that granted approval.
- Reference/permit number and date of approval.
- A declaration that the study complied with the Declaration of Helsinki.

PMDC Requirement: *All studies involving human subjects must carry an ERC/IRB approval statement from a committee registered with the National Bioethics Committee (NBC) of Pakistan or an internationally recognized equivalent. Studies without this will not proceed to peer review.*

2.3 Exemptions

Studies not involving direct contact with human subjects (e.g., literature reviews, secondary data analyses) must submit an exemption letter from an institutional ERC/IRB. If the author's institution has no ERC/IRB, approval must be sought from an accredited external institution.

2.4 Animal Research

Manuscripts involving animal experimentation must confirm compliance with the Institutional Committee for the Care and Use of Animals (IACUC) or an equivalent national body, and must demonstrate adherence to the 3Rs principle (Replace, Reduce, Refine).

3. INFORMED CONSENT

3.1 Human Participants

Written informed consent must be obtained from all participants prior to enrolment. Where participants are minors or lack capacity, consent must be obtained from their legal guardian or next of kin. The manuscript must include a statement confirming consent was obtained.

3.2 Patient Anonymity & Privacy

All patient identifiers must be removed from text, figures, tables, and photographs. Where a potentially identifying image is scientifically essential, a signed patient consent-to-publish form must be submitted with the manuscript. Authors bear full responsibility for ensuring anonymity.

3.3 Case Reports

All case reports require written patient consent for publication and an approval letter on official institutional letterhead signed by the head of department, submitted alongside the manuscript.

4. AUTHORSHIP CRITERIA

4.1 ICMJE Standards

To qualify as an author, all four of the following ICMJE conditions must be met:

- Substantial contribution to the conception, design, data acquisition, analysis, or interpretation.
- Drafting or critically revising the manuscript for important intellectual content.
- Approval of the final version to be published.
- Agreement to be accountable for all aspects of the work, including integrity and accuracy.

4.2 Gift & Ghost Authorship

PMDC & HEC Warning: *Gift authorship (listing non-contributors) and ghost authorship (omitting genuine contributors) are serious research misconduct under PMDC professional code and HEC Anti-Plagiarism Policy 2023. Manuscripts where such misconduct is confirmed will be rejected or retracted, and the matter may be reported to the authors' institutions.*

4.3 Changes to Authorship

Any change to the author list after submission requires written justification signed by all authors and approval by the Editor-in-Chief. Changes to authorship are not permitted after acceptance.

5. PLAGIARISM & ORIGINALITY

5.1 HEC Compliance

JBIHS enforces the HEC Anti-Plagiarism Policy (Version 2.0, 2023). All submitted manuscripts are screened via Turnitin or an HEC-approved equivalent before entering peer review.

HEC Similarity Thresholds (mandatory for all submissions):

- Overall similarity index: must not exceed 19%
- Similarity from any single source: must not exceed 5%

Manuscripts exceeding these thresholds will be rejected or returned before peer review.

5.2 Forms of Plagiarism

- Verbatim or near-verbatim copying of text without citation and quotation marks.
- Paraphrasing another author's ideas without attribution.
- Reproducing figures, tables, or data without permission and acknowledgement.

- Self-plagiarism: reusing substantial portions of one's own prior published work without disclosure.
- Duplicate submission: submitting the same manuscript to more than one journal simultaneously.
- Salami slicing: artificially dividing a single study into multiple minimal publications.

5.3 Collective Responsibility

Under HEC policy, all co-authors bear collective responsibility for the originality of submitted work. Supervisors and principal investigators share responsibility for plagiarism committed by their students or research team members.

6. RESEARCH DATA INTEGRITY

Authors must retain accurate records of raw data for a minimum of five (5) years after publication. The editorial office may request original data at any stage. The following constitute research misconduct and will result in rejection or retraction:

- Fabrication: inventing data, results, or findings that were not collected.
- Falsification: manipulating, altering, or selectively omitting data to misrepresent findings.
- Inappropriate image manipulation, including contrast or brightness alterations that change scientific meaning.

7. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

All authors must disclose any financial or non-financial conflict of interest that could influence results or their interpretation. This includes funding from commercial entities, employment, consultancy, patent holdings, or personal relationships related to the study. Where no conflict exists, authors must state: "The authors declare no conflict of interest."

8. CORRECTIONS & RETRACTIONS

8.1 Corrections

Where a significant error affects the integrity or interpretation of published findings, a formal correction notice will be published. Minor errors not affecting conclusions will be recorded as an online erratum.

8.2 Expressions of Concern

An expression of concern may be issued where possible misconduct is under investigation but a definitive conclusion has not yet been reached.

8.3 Retractions

Articles will be retracted in accordance with COPE Retraction Guidelines when findings are unreliable due to misconduct or error, plagiarism or duplicate publication is confirmed, or the research involved undisclosed unethical conduct. Retracted articles remain accessible online with a clear retraction notice. Where warranted, PMDC and HEC will be notified.

9. REPORTING MISCONDUCT

Allegations of plagiarism, fabrication, falsification, or authorship misconduct may be submitted in writing to the Editor-in-Chief. Anonymous complaints will be considered only where sufficient documentary evidence is provided to allow a meaningful investigation. Consistent with HEC policy, the journal encourages complainants to identify themselves; identified complainants will receive formal acknowledgement and updates on the outcome. All allegations will be handled confidentially following COPE investigation guidelines. Outcomes may include rejection, retraction, or referral to PMDC or HEC.

10. OPEN ACCESS & COPYRIGHT

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11. POLICY REVIEW

This policy will be reviewed at least every two years, or sooner in response to updates in PMDC regulations, HEC policy, or international standards. The current version is available on the JBIHS website. Authors should consult the current version at the time of submission.

For queries contact the Editorial Office — Bashir Institute of Health Sciences, Pakistan