Exploring Publication Ethics Issues in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences: A COPE Study

Conducted by COPE and supported by Routledge (Taylor & Francis Group)

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publicationethics.org

Research background

COPE perceived as STM-focused

Routledge (Taylor & Francis Group): the world's largest publisher of humanities and social sciences journals *(2018 Clarivate Analytics)*

Enhance understanding of the publication ethics landscape for AHSS editors

COPE PROMOTING INTEGRITY IN RESEARCH AND ITS PUBLICATION

ROUTLEDGE Routledge Taylor & Francis Group

Awareness	Challenges	Needs and gaps	Communications preferences
Are arts, humanities, and social sciences editors/journals aware of **COPE** and familiar with the work it does?	What issues are these editors/journals dealing with? What is it that these editors/journals need from **COPE** in terms of support?	What is **COPE** not currently providing?	How could **COPE** best communicate the services it provides to those involved in arts, humanities, and social sciences journal publication?

The aim

To better understand the publishing ethics needs of arts, humanities and social sciences journal editors, and to identify areas where they may need specific guidance and support.

Online focus groups

COPE members only.

Used GoToMeeting software for typed chat.
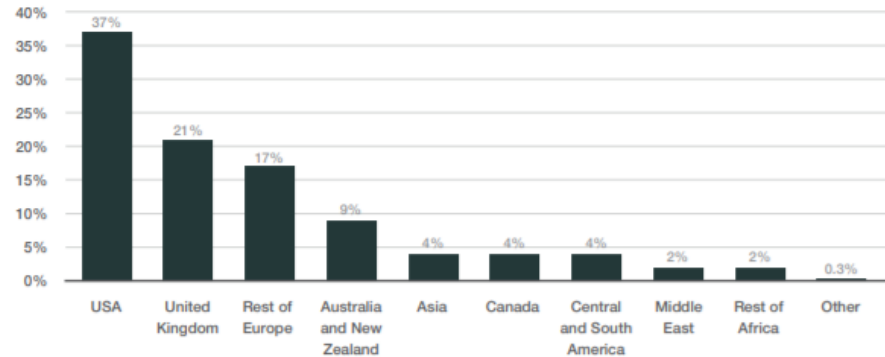
Two x 75 minute sessions.

Online survey

Open to academic editors of AHSS journals, both COPE members and non-members.
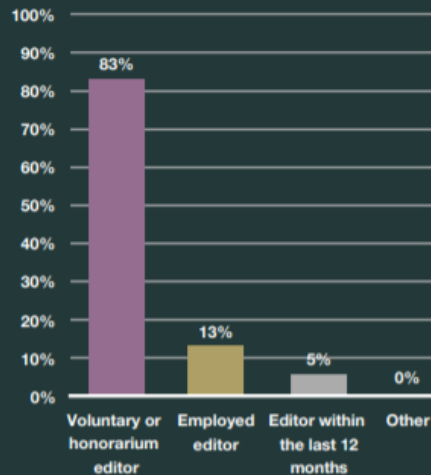
30 questions.

656 usable responses.
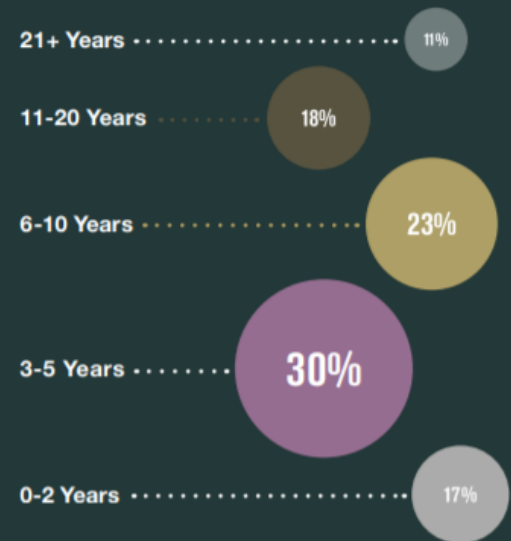
Demographics

IN WHICH COUNTRY ARE YOU BASED?

USA 37%
United Kingdom 21%
Rest of Europe 17%
Australia and New Zealand 9%
Asia 4%
Canada 4%
Central and South America 4%
Middle East 2%
Rest of Africa 2%
Other 0.3%

Base n=645

DO YOU HAVE AN EDITORIAL ROLE ON A SCHOLARLY JOURNAL?

Voluntary or honorarium editor 83%
Employed editor 13%
Editor within the last 12 months 5%
Other 0%

Base n=656, all respondents, respondents were able to give more than one response. Decimal numbers rounded off. Other responses <1% excluded from the chart.

HOW MANY YEARS HAVE YOU HAD AN EDITORIAL ROLE ON A SCHOLARLY JOURNAL?

21+ Years 11%
11-20 Years 18%
6-10 Years 23%
3-5 Years 30%
0-2 Years 17%

Subject disciplines

Information Sciences
Finance
Law
Education
Economics
Social Studies
Multi- and Interdisciplinary
Business
Humanities
Behavioural Sciences
Industry
Arts

Limitations

- Distribution of the sample
- Sample size and generalisation about subject-level differences
- Geographical representation
- No subject comparison group
- Self categorisation of subject groupings
- Respondent self-selection

The results

What is driving publication ethics issues?

Online access to papers and the peer review process

"Ties between reviewers and authors that make blind review impossible are also worries. In particular, a reviewer can often easily uncover the author because working papers are published online prior to submission to a journal."

Journal editor, social sciences.

Globalisation, inclusion and diversity

"Increased numbers of writers from non-English speaking backgrounds whose language issues seriously affect how we can work with their material. We presently have a good diversity of reviewers but this must be kept up through active searching for appropriate reviewers."

Journal editor, social sciences.

Technology and authorship

"Machine-authored manuscripts are beginning to seem like a real possibility."

Journal editor, humanities and social sciences.

New technologies around data gathering and analysis

"With the increased mainstreaming of *"big data"*, machine learning, and artificial intelligence, there will be new ethical issues that emerge in terms of data privacy, reproducible research, and knowledge generation. I could imagine investigators using methods they do not understand completely and inadvertently publishing misleading or identifying information."

Journal editor, social sciences.

Academic culture an incentives

"Weighing speed of publication given REF (Research Excellence Framework) requirements in the UK... is it ethical to ask an emeritus professor to wait to be published if a junior professor in the UK needs a publication now for REF 2020?"

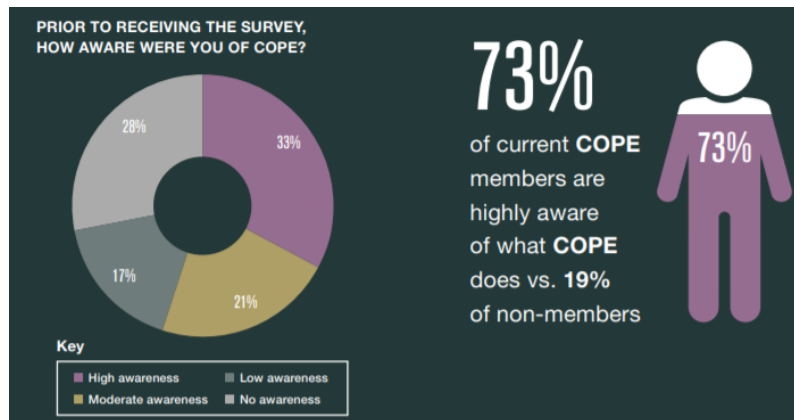Journal editor, humanities and arts.

- 57% consult COPE resources.

- 18% considered them to be an extremely important source.

- Guidelines particularly useful (43% rated as extremely useful).

- 48% unaware of the support COPE provides.

- 22% unaware of COPE.

The challenges

Most serious[1]	Most widespread[2]	Most frequent when experienced[3]	Least confident in dealing with[4]
Detecting plagiarism and poor attribution standards	Addressing language and writing quality barriers while remaining inclusive	Addressing language and writing quality barriers while remaining inclusive	Data and/or image fabrication issues
Fraudulent submissions	Detecting plagiarism and poor attribution standards	Issues around the way in which authors receive and respond to criticism	Fraudulent submissions
Data and/or image fabrication issues	Recognising and dealing with bias in reviewer comments	Detecting plagiarism and poor attribution standards	Intellectual property and copyright issues

Challenges: fraudulent submissions

- 44% consider these to be among the most serious ethical issues

- 24% lack confidence in addressing them

- Types of fraudulent submissions include:

  - Hoax articles

  - Submissions by a third party

- Can lead to retractions and reputational damage.

Challenges: data and/or image fabrication

"Data fabrication can be a big concern since the validation of reported results is often not within practical means of the reviewers (as they would have to have access to the raw data and be willing to replicate the analyses being reported)."
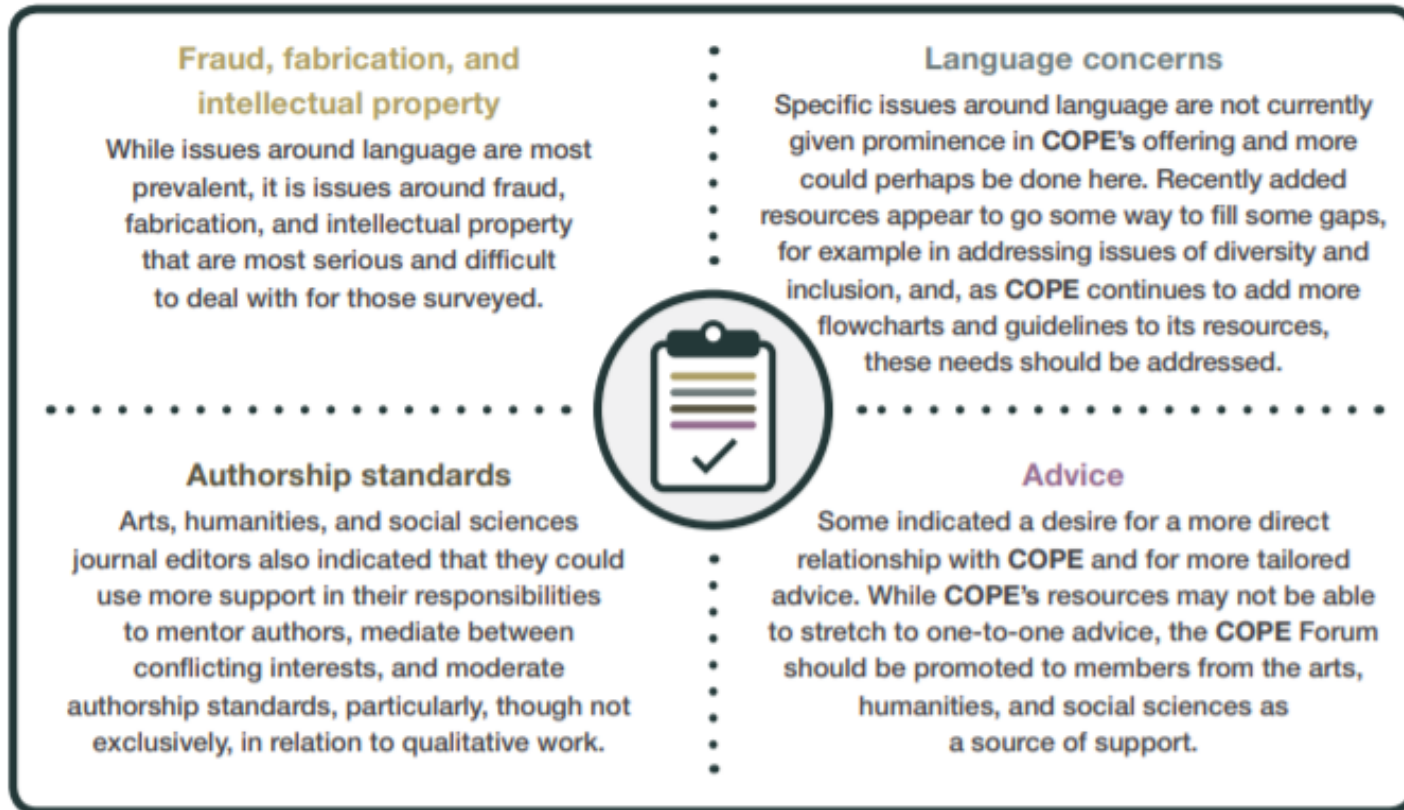
Business, Finance and Economics journal editor, US

Challenges: language issues

Reported as widespread and frequent

- Balancing language and diversity
- Tensions between quality and global representation
- Peer reviewer diversity

Key areas of opportunity

Fraud, fabrication, and intellectual property

While issues around language are most prevalent, it is issues around fraud, fabrication, and intellectual property that are most serious and difficult to deal with for those surveyed.

Language concerns

Specific issues around language are not currently given prominence in **COPE's** offering and more could perhaps be done here. Recently added resources appear to go some way to fill some gaps, for example in addressing issues of diversity and inclusion, and, as **COPE** continues to add more flowcharts and guidelines to its resources, these needs should be addressed.

Authorship standards

Arts, humanities, and social sciences journal editors also indicated that they could use more support in their responsibilities to mentor authors, mediate between conflicting interests, and moderate authorship standards, particularly, though not exclusively, in relation to qualitative work.

Advice

Some indicated a desire for a more direct relationship with **COPE** and for more tailored advice. While **COPE's** resources may not be able to stretch to one-to-one advice, the **COPE** Forum should be promoted to members from the arts, humanities, and social sciences as a source of support.

What next?

- A foundation *for* further collaboration and research between COPE and arts, humanities and social sciences journal editors

- Developing existing or creating new guidance

- Raising awareness of existing resources among arts, humanities and social sciences journal editors

Read the study

publicationethics.org