

Manuscript withdrawal and its possible consequences

As I tried to convey in my previously published manuscripts, publication ethics misconduct is a considerably common situation encountered by the journal Editors. The request for withdrawal of a manuscript submitted to the journal for evaluation is an important mechanism to correct written literature and ensure its accuracy. However, this event is not common among the cases of ethics misconduct. It is used to prevent researchers from the publications that contain extremely defective and erroneous data and results obtained from these data. Even though manuscript withdrawal is uncommon event, we would like to summarize the rules and possible consequences of manuscript withdrawal due to a recent case that we experienced.

The publication process of a scientific paper starts with the submission of the manuscript by corresponding author to a scientific journal and this process continues until the publication of the manuscript in electronic or printed format. The authors and publication team are under obligation in all steps of the publication process. The most important obligation of the authors is the delivery of results obtained from real and accurate data to the readers. If concerns have been raised regarding the accuracy of the data and results, responsible author or contributing authors can withdraw the manuscript at any stage of the publication process. Most national and international journals describe the rules and consequences of manuscript withdrawal in detail on the "Information to the Authors" page. This information must be also written on the copyright transfer form and brought to the attention of the authors. Even if particular conditions related to manuscript withdrawal have not been specified in copyright transfer form and/or manuscript preparation rules for the journal, the authors are deemed to know the publication ethics anyway (1-6).

Any manuscript which publication procedure has already began in a journal can be withdrawn by the authors or journal Editor. However, because editor is responsible for the content of the journal, the final decision for the article withdrawal is belonged to the journal editor. The "withdraw(al)" of a manuscript by the author and "retraction" of a manuscript by journal Editor are different procedures and will have different consequences. But, the term "withdraw" can sometimes be used for retraction of publication by editor. The withdrawal of a published manuscript by editor occurs in the presence of a severe ethics misconduct (duplication, plagiarism, publication fraud, etc.) or serious errors in the study results. This withdrawal process is often followed by sanctions imposed to the author and group of authors. The editor should immediately publish withdrawal statement and inform the readers about the event in order to

minimize detrimental effects of misleading manuscripts. The editor must clearly indicate the case of withdrawal with the title of the manuscript withdrawn and name of the authors involved and by whom (author or editor) the manuscript has been withdrawn. Furthermore, the rationales for withdrawal must be indicated. If it is a case of duplicate publication, the journal that has published the second copy of the article should withdraw the published manuscript and clearly announce the reason why manuscript has been retracted (2, 5, 7-9).

As the subject of the current manuscripts, withdrawal of a manuscript by the authors is performed only in the presence of serious concerns about the reliability of the data or validity of the results presented in a manuscript. Otherwise, it is not advised in the absence of a serious error (mistakes in data, inadequacy of discussion, etc.). In the case of manuscript withdrawal, efforts and time spent by the editor and the referees for the manuscript will be wasted. Furthermore, this action will raise unfavorable thoughts about the corresponding author and also other authors (2, 4, 5). The Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) published international standards of publication ethics for the authors and these standards have also been adopted by the journals appearing in the international scientific indices. According to these standards, if an authors request to withdraw their already submitted article for publishing to a journal, a letter signed by all authors stating their request and reasons for withdrawal must be sent to journal editor regardless of the stage of the review process. Because, the publication process for an individual manuscript begins with the assignment of a register number and it can be withdrawn only with the permission of the editor after a manuscript has been registered (2, 4, 9).

An assessment in the editor's office following manuscript submission is the first step of the publication process. The requested revisions should be completed and the revised manuscript should be sent to the editor's office by the corresponding author within a specified time period, which is often 2-3 weeks depending on the journal, before peer-review process. After a reasonable waiting period, the Editor's office of the journal sends a reminder letter to the corresponding author. After that, if this notification returns with no response, Editor's office attempts to establish a contact with the co-authors and also the administrator of the institution. At this step, author and/or authors may also request the withdrawal of their manuscript (1, 3, 4). In event of the eligible reasons for article withdrawal are not presented by the authors, the editor may not accept the request for withdrawal. Here, an important issue is that with-



drawn process will not come true in case of authors do not respond to the letter sent from the Editor's office with the assumption that their manuscript has not been sent for peer-review yet. And, authors must not assume their manuscript has been withdrawn until they have received the Editor's letter acknowledging the withdrawal. Particularly young researchers commonly experience with this problem as the rules of publication ethics do not adequately known, and nevertheless, they may encounter unfavorable consequences in the future because publication process still continues. That the researchers cannot send their manuscript to another journal without ending withdrawal process in accordance to the rules of publication ethics is another important matter. Otherwise, redundant publication or simultaneous submission case will occur and the process recommended by the international ethics committees for duplicate publications will be pursued. The editors have a responsibility for managing cases of suspected misconduct such as redundant and simultaneous submission to another journal even though the paper was withdrawn from the journal. I will not mention in detail about this subject as it has already been extensively discussed before (10).

The assessment in the Editor's office is followed by peer-review process and the corresponding author may request the withdrawal of the paper at this step, too. In general, withdrawal of a paper after initiation of the evaluation for the publication is unacceptable unless it contains serious errors and unreliable results. After the author received the reports covering opinions and suggestions of the referee and/or editor, he/ she must respond professionally and perform the advised revisions in accordance with the publication ethical rules within a specified time. Again, authors must not be assume their manuscript has been withdrawn in case of the Editor's letter containing the opinions and suggestions of the referee is not responded and the revised document is not sent to the Editor's office. The journal will continue publication process until the withdrawal request letter due to unavoidable reasons and signed by all authors has been received. This letter must include the title and identification number of the manuscript, names and signatures of all contributing authors, date and the reasons why the paper must be withdrawn. Editor will sent an acknowledging letter to the authors whether their withdrawal request is acceptable or not. Therefore, authors must wait until they have received appropriate notification from the editorial office. If the author(s) insist on withdrawal of the manuscript without any valid reason, the journal may claim monetary compensation for the spent time and resources for the assessment of submitted paper (3, 5).

The withdrawal of a manuscript by the author or authors at the final step of the publication process, after the paper is accepted for publication or after publication is possible but an undesired event and the withdrawal is not permitted in principle. The published manuscripts (in online or printed version) can be withdrawn by the Editor (*retraction*) in the present of above-mentioned conditions. The editor should notify the readers on

the retraction reasons as soon as possible. In the case of a withdrawal of a manuscript before publication, the author will be imposed to disincentive sanctions. These may include payment of a certain amount to the journal (some journals specify payable amount in the "Information to the Authors" section) or rejection of the manuscripts from the involved authors for a certain period of time; most of scientific journals impose both sanctions on authors (4, 5, 8).

In conclusion, the authors can request withdrawal of their manuscript from submission to publication; however, it is not advised unless it is obligatory. The journal Editor must be informed with a withdrawal request letter signed by all authors indicating valid rationales. A submitted manuscript will not be withdrawn from peer review until a withdraw request letter has reached to editorial office. Authors must not assume their manuscript has been withdrawn until they have received a acknowledgement letter from the Editor's office. The journal Editor does have a responsibility to impose disincentive sanctions, such as payment of the charge, rejection of the articles submitting by same authors etc, on the corresponding author and contributing authors according to international rules for publication ethics if the manuscript is not withdrawn properly, and even if the withdrawal is permitted. Internalization of the publication ethics rules by young researchers during their pre- and post-doctorate educations will be useful to prevent such ethics misconduct event.

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