

# The Malversations of Authorship - Current Status in Academic Community and How to Prevent It

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## ABSTRACT

**Aim:** Aim of article was to evaluate knowledge and practice of authorship issues among the academic population in the medical field. **Material and methods:** Article has an analytical character and includes 69 academic workers (from the medical field, with the status of a regular employee of the Faculty of Medicine or a professional associate) who responded to the survey. **Results:** Within the total number of respondents in the study, 34.8% of them were added as coauthors, although they did not have any input in the writing process. Even 47.8% of the respondents were under psychological pressure, that they have to add their superiors to the list of authors, though they did not have any contribution at any stage of the article preparation, while 29% of the respondents had a tacit agreement about mutual adding to the author's list, and 36.2% added their superiors to the author's list, in order that the first author would get a permission to publish the article in a certain journal. **Conclusion:** The relationship between the author, the mentor, the data processing person, the person providing the moral support etc. must be established, and not all of them has a place in the list of authors, they should be given special places at the end of the article, a space for acknowledgments, where these people may be mentioned. The consciousness of the academic community must change for the purpose of the concrete progress of the academic community and the scientific contributions of its members.

**Keywords:** authorship, authorship criteria, authorship issues.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The issue of authorship, although simple at first glance, is an extremely complex issue, and present a place where many malversations and violations of ethical principles can be found (1-5). In order to make rapid progress and sometimes because of goals that are extremely difficult to fulfill, authors have precise agreement with their colleagues about signing each other, also they add their colleagues in authors list (most often head of the department or clinic), and sometimes it is simply assumed that employees of the same department sign each other on articles. COPE and ICMJE principles are extremely clear about defining the term «author», and their guidelines have been followed by all journals that follow ethical norms of scientific publication (2, 6-8). The poor quality of many papers in any form and subject published in the biomedical journals increased average number of listed authors per article. It is often triggered by the tendency and

practice for hyper production and misconduct in scientific publishing (9). At least, biomedical authorship continues to have important academic, social and financial implications and it is crucial in the career of academic and scientific people. In scientific literature has described several of inappropriate types of authorship (9): a) guest authorship; b) honorary or gift authorship; c) ghost authorship; d) anonymous authorship; group authorship, etc. The “guest” author makes no discernible contributions to the study, so this person meets none of the criteria for authorship. Honorary/gift authorship is based on ones position as the head of department in which the study took place. Ghost authors participate in the research, data analysis, and or writing of a manuscript but are not named or disclosed in the author byline or acknowledgments. The terms honorary and ghost authorship is present in a form of malversation of authorial issues, and in practice they are not rare (3, 4).

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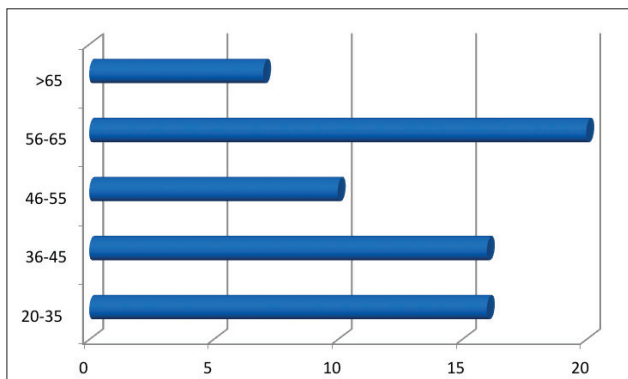


Figure 1. Distribution of respondents according to age

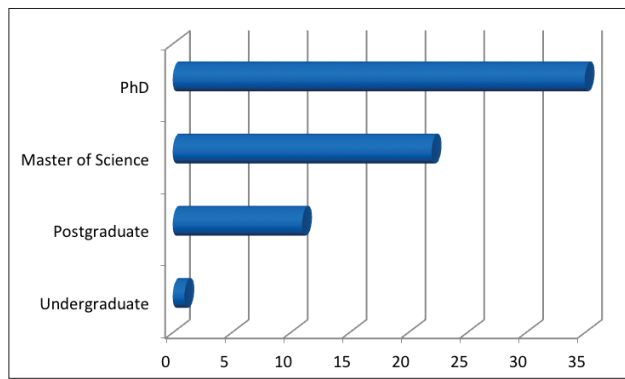


Figure 2. Distribution of respondents according to degree

2. AIM

To evaluate the knowledge and practice of authorship issues among the academic population in the medical field.

3. MATERIAL AND METHODS

Article has an analytical character and includes 69 academic workers (from the medical field, with the status of a regular employee of the Faculty of Medicine or a professional associate) who responded to the survey. Statistical data processing was performed using descriptive statistics and evaluation by Pearson’s contingency coefficient. The data are processed using the statistical package IBM Statistics SPSS v 23.

4. RESULTS

Out of the total number of respondents, those 55–65 years of age (29%) were most present (Figure 1), and the most com-

monly represented respondents were with a PhD degree (Figure 2). The answers of survey have been respondents and answers are presented in Table 1 (only positive answers are retained)

Statistical data processing also raises the correlation of questions with respect to the age of respondents (Table 2, no statistical significance, p based on the contingency coefficient according to Pearson), related to the academic status (Table 3) (no statistical significance). Only positive answers left. Statistical significance was not present, based on the contingency coefficient according to Pearson. Correlation of academic degree and age was also analyzed. There is a significant correlation with regard to the time required for obtaining degree) (Table 4).

5. DISCUSSION

It is a public secret that Bosnia and Herzegovina, as a Balkan country, a country in transition, still has a different view on authorship in published articles. Within the total number of respondents in the study, 34.8% of them were added as coauthors, although they did not have any input in the writing process. Even 47.8% of the respondents were under psychological pressure, that they have to add their superiors to the list of authors, though they did not have any contribution at any stage of the article preparation. Then, 29% of the respondents had a tacit agreement about mutual adding to the author’s list, and 36.2% added their superiors to the author’s list, in order that the first author would get a permission to pub-

	N	%
Have you been added to the article as co-author even You did not give contribution (honorary authorship)?	24	34.8
Have you given contribution to some article but you were not on author list (ghost authorship)?	35	50.7
Have you been under the obligation to add your superiors in list of authors. in order to be able to submit article to the journal?	25	36.2
Have you ever added your superiors in list of authors of an article in order to keep "peace" at work?	33	47.8
Do you have a reciprocal agreement with your colleagues about the simultaneous signing on articles?	20	29.0
Have you heard about COPE and ICMJE principles?	45	65.2

Table 1. The answers on the survey

		Age					Total
		20-35 yrs.	36-45 yrs.	46-55 yrs.	56-65 yrs.	>65 yrs.	
Have you been added to the article as co-author even You did not give contribution (honorary authorship)? p=0.350	N	8	7	3	5	1	24
	%	50.0	43.8	30.0	25.0	14.3	34.8
Have you given contribution to some article but you were not on author list (ghost authorship)? p=0.134	N	5	7	8	12	3	35
	%	31.3	43.8	80.0	60.0	42.9	50.7
Have you been under the obligation to add your superiors in list of authors. in order to be able to submit article to the journal? p=0.383	N	8	4	2	9	2	25
	%	50.0	25.0	20.0	45.0	28.6	36.2
Have you ever added your superiors in list of authors of an article in order to keep "peace" at work? p=0.564	N	6	8	5	12	2	33
	%	37.5	50.0	50.0	60.0	28.6	47.8
Do you have a reciprocal agreement with your colleagues about the simultaneous signing on articles? p=0.080	N	5	1	2	8	4	20
	%	31.3	6.3	20.0	40.0	57.1	29.0
Have you heard about COPE and ICMJE principles? p=0.305	N	8	12	5	14	6	45
	%	50.0	75.0	50.0	70.0	85.7	65.2
Total	N	16	16	10	20	7	69
	%	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 2. Correlation of answers to questions and age of respondents

		Academical status				Total
		Undergraduate	Postgraduate	Master of Science	PhD	
Have you been added to the article as co-author even You did not give contribution (honorary authorship)? p=0.118	N	0	3	12	9	24
	%	0.0	27.3	54.5	25.7	34.8
Have you given contribution to some article but you were not on author list (ghost authorship)? p=0.264	N	1	3	11	20	35
	%	100.0	27.3	50.0	57.1	50.7
Have you been under the obligation to add your superiors in list of authors. in order to be able to submit article to the journal? p=0.445	N	0	5	10	10	25
	%	0.0	45.5	45.5	28.6	36.2
Have you ever added your superiors in list of authors of an article in order to keep "peace" at work? p=0.583	N	0	5	9	19	33
	%	0.0	45.5	40.9	54.3	47.8
Do you have a reciprocal agreement with your colleagues about the simultaneous signing on articles? p=0.906	N	0	3	6	11	20
	%	0.0	27.3	27.3	31.4	29.0
Have you heard about COPE and ICMJE principles? p=0.781	N	1	7	13	24	45
	%	100.0	63.6	59.1	68.6	65.2
Total	N	1	11	22	35	69
	%	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 3. Correlation of answers to questions and the academic degree of the respondents

Age * Academical status		Academical status				Total
		Undergraduate	Postgraduate	Master of Science	PhD	
20-35 yrs.	N	0	9	6	1	16
	%	0.0	81.8	27.3	2.9	23.2
36-45 yrs.	N	1	2	7	6	16
	%	100.0	18.2	31.8	17.1	23.2
46-55 yrs.	N	0	0	2	8	10
	%	0.0	0.0	9.1	22.9	14.5
56-65 yrs.	N	0	0	6	14	20
	%	0.0	0.0	27.3	40.0	29.0
>65 yrs.	N	0	0	1	6	7
	%	0.0	0.0	4.5	17.1	10.1
Total	N	1	11	22	35	69
	%	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 4. Correlation between the academic degree and the age of the respondents. p=0.0001

lish the article in a certain journal.

The results of the survey we conducted are disastrous for members of the academic community, and they present an increasingly important problem for the academic community. On the one hand, we have a false advancement in the academic community, because the false number of references provide a fake picture of the author about its academic work, then, we have present false representation, most often of the heads of certain divisions. This is another obvious proof of the extent to which, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and even wider territory, professional and academic advancement are linked with non-ethical academic and scientific representation. On the other hand, we have a violation of all ethical norms of scientific publication. Falsely signing of statements on authors' contributions of one author in journal, produce false information about the participation in certain stages of the research itself, which results are published, violates the rating of both authors and journals (4, 5, 6). Namely, the rating of the scientist is increasing, and with this also its scientometric indicators, and basically that is unfounded.

Answers to the question „What to do about this?“ are almost none. The answer is somewhere in the attempt to change the consciousness of the entire academic community, which is extremely difficult. Authors must be aware that a large

number of authors of one article reduce or undermine the work of the first author or authors who have really contributed to the research. Every scientific work requires a renunciation, which sometimes cannot be realistically valued on any basis. Neglecting to do so is by neglecting yourself. On the other hand, authors conducting research need to know that there is a big difference in the position within the list of authors. The increasingly present use of the scientometric analysis method, and recently the development of the Google Scholar analytics package, has put the focus of the h-index as a quality indicator of the scientific work. The question is how much this one, and other indexes for the scientific validation of scientific and academic status, and rating are good indicator, when looking at the results of this survey related to the problem of interpersonal correspondence, caused by different reasons and motives (5, 7). In this case, many non-ethical procedures become a problem for public discussion in the scientific and academic community.

The results of the conducted survey, which results are presented in this article, place the h index in a very unfortunate position, and calling into question its real value in scientometry, at least as far as biomedical science is concerned. Of course, the sample in this research is small, and exclusively refers to the opinion and attitude of the members of the academic medical community. In addition, research includes a limited geographic area, but it is indicative and suggests that it is necessary to develop better indicators for evaluating a scientist. Our research included 50% of young researchers (at age 20-35) who are under obligation to add their superiors, which is a big problem, and probably in one hand demotivates or even „kills“ the very desire of young people for promotion. Of course, this is a huge mistake among young people, but also a big problem that needs to be resolved in the future. The relationship between the author, the mentor, the data processing person, the person providing the moral support etc. must be established, and not all of them has a place in the list of authors, they should be given special places at the end of the article, a space for acknowledgments, where these people may be mentioned. The consciousness of the academic community must change for the purpose of the concrete progress of the academic community and the scientific contributions of its members.

Early Regenerative Modifications of Human Postmenopausal Atrophic Vaginal Mucosa Following Fractional CO<sub>2</sub> Laser Treatment  
Stefano Salvatore, Katlein França, Torello Lotti, Marta Parma, Sonia Palmieri, Massimo Candiani, Edoardo D'Este, Simona V Antonia Icaro Cornaglia, Aurora Farina, Federica Riva, Alberto Calligaro, Jacopo Lotti, Uwe Wollina, Georgi Tchernev, Nicola Zerbinati

In Vitro Evaluation of the Biosafety of Hyaluronic Acid PEG Cross-Linked with Micromolecules of Calcium Hydroxyapatite in Low Concentration

Nicola Zerbinati, Torello Lotti, Damiano Monticelli, Raffaele Rauso, Pablo González-Isaza, Edoardo D'Este, Alberto Calligaro, Sabrina Sommatís, Cristina Maccario, Roberto Mocchi, Jacopo Lotti, Uwe Wollina, Georgi Tchernev, Katlein França

In Vitro Evaluation of the Sensitivity of a Hyaluronic Acid PEG Cross-Linked to Bovine Testes Hyaluronidase

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## Clinical Science

Carbon Dioxide with a New Pulse Profile and Shape: A Perfect Tool to Perform Labiaplasty for Functional and Cosmetic Purposes  
Pablo González-Isaza, Torello Lotti, Katlein França, Rafael Sanchez-Borrego, Juan Escribano Tórtola, Jacopo Lotti, Uwe Wollina, Georgi Tchernev, Nicola Zerbinati

Epidermoid Cysts – A Wide Spectrum of Clinical Presentation and Successful Treatment by Surgery: A Retrospective 10-Year Analysis and Literature Review

Uwe Wollina, Dana Langner, Georgi Tchernev, Katlein França, Torello Lotti

Intralesional Diode Laser 1064 nm for the Treatment of Hidradenitis Suppurativa: A Report of Twenty Patients

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Dermatofibrosarcoma Protuberans: Retrospective Single Center Analysis Over 16 Years

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Automatic Artificial Hair Implant: Safety and Efficacy in Androgenetic Alopecia. A Prospective Study with a Highly Biocompatible Fiber

Amr Abdel - Hakim Rateb Said, Bogdan Morad Albzour, Mariangela Santiago, Manjul Agrawal, Miriam Rovesti, Francesca Satolli, Uwe Wollina, Georgi Tchernev, Jacopo Lotti, Torello Lotti

Successful Treatment with UVA 1 Laser of Non - Responder Vitiligo Patients

Torello Lotti, Georgi Tchernev, Uwe Wollina, Katlein França, Jacopo Lotti, Francesca Satolli, Miriam Rovesti, Serena Gianfaldoni

Micro - Focused Phototherapy Associated To Janus Kinase Inhibitor: A Promising Valid Therapeutic Option for Patients with Localized Vitiligo

Serena Gianfaldoni, Georgi Tchernev, Uwe Wollina, Maria Grazia Rocca, Massimo Fioranelli, Jacopo Lotti, Miriam Rovesti, Francesca Satolli, Yan Valle, Andy Goren, Michael Tirant, Mirna Situm, Maja Kovacevic, Katlein França, Torello Lotti

An Innovative Therapeutic Protocol for Vitiligo: Experience with the Use of Fraxel Erbium Laser, Topical Latanoprost and Successive Irradiation with UVA - 1 Laser

Torello Lotti, Uwe Wollina, Georgi Tchernev, Yan Valle, Jacopo Lotti, Katlein França, Francesca Satolli, Miriam Rovesti, Michael Tirant, Ilia Lozev, Ivan Pidakev, Serena Gianfaldoni

## 2016 ESC Guidelines for the diagnosis and treatment of acute and chronic heart failure: The Task Force for the diagnosis and treatment of acute and chronic heart failure of the European Society of Cardiology (ESC) Developed with the special contribution of the Heart Failure Association (HFA) of the ESC.

Ponikowski P, Voors AA, Anker SD, Bueno H, Cleland JG, Coats AJ, Falk V, González-Juanatey JR, Harjola VP, Jankowska EA, Jessup M, Linde C, Nihoyannopoulos P, Parissis JT, Pieske B, Riley JP, Rosano GM, Ruilope LM, Ruschitzka F, Rutten FH, van der Meer P; Authors/Task Force Members.

### Collaborators (112)

Filippatos G, McMurray JJ, Aboyans V, Achenbach S, Agewall S, Al-Attar N, Atherton JJ, Bauersachs J, John Camm A, Carerj S, Ceconi C, Coca A, Elliott P, Erol Ç, Ezekowitz J, Fernández-Golfín C, Fitzsimons D, Guazzi M, Guenoun M, Hasenfuss G, Hindricks G, Hoes AW, Iung B, Jaarsma T, Kirchhof P, Knuuti J, Kolh P, Konstantinides S, Lainscak M, Lancellotti P, Lip GY, Maisano F, Mueller C, Petrie MC, Piepoli MF, Priori SG, Torbicki A, Tsutsui H, van Veldhuisen DJ, Windecker S, Yancy C, Zamorano JL, Zamorano JL, Aboyans V, Achenbach S, Agewall S, Badimon L, Barón-Esquivias G, Baumgartner H, Bax JJ, Bueno H, Carerj S, Dean V, Erol Ç, Fitzsimons D, Gaemperli O, Kirchhof P, Kolh P, Lancellotti P, Lip GY, Nihoyannopoulos P, Piepoli MF, Ponikowski P, Roffi M, Torbicki A, Vaz Carneiro A, Windecker S, Sisakian HS, Isayev E, Kurlianskaya A, Mullens W, Tokmakova M, Agathangelou P, Melenovsky V, Wiggers H, Hassanein M, Uetova T, Lommi J, Kostovska ES, Juillière Y, Aladashvili A, Luchner A, Chrysohoou C, Nyolczas N, Thorgeirsson G, Marc Weinstein J, Di Lenarda A, Aidargaliyeva N, Bajraktari G, Beishenkulov M, Kamzola G, Abdel-Massih T, Čelutkienė J, Noppe S, Cassar A, Vataman E, Abir-Khalil S, van Pol P, Mo R, Straburzyńska-Migaj E, Fonseca C, Chioncel O, Shlyakhto E, Otasevic P, Goncalvesová E, Lainscak M, Díaz Molina B, Schaufelberger M, Suter T, Yilmaz MB, Voronkov L, Davies C.

Figure 3. Examples of controversial authorship/co-authorship in biomedical articles mentioned in this text

The most common forms of controversial or even fake authorship/co-authorship in practice today are:

- „Adding“ as a co-author, in articles extracted or compiled as excerpts of diploma papers, master’s and doctoral theses, of mentors and members of the commission as the author of the article;
- „Adding“ as a co-author in the article the heads of departments, institutes, divisions, or the entire institution in which the author works or has worked;
- „Adding“ as a co-author of an article a dean, vice dean, rector, vice-rector or other politically influential person from whom the authors benefit in any kind or any other form of convenience - at the workplace, in academic careers, in political parties, and in party functions (bosses, various committees, ministerial or managerial positions, etc.);
- „Adding“ as a co-author of the article a colleague from a professional or academic branch in the country or abroad, by the principle „You add to me, and I will add you“ in order to increase the number of articles published by an author, or the citation of these articles in certain databases, or author rating from the aspect of scientometric indicators;
- „Adding“ as a co-author of the article of close or distant members of the family, even those who are not in the same scientific, academic or professional field;
- „Adding“ as a co-author of the article persons who have the ability to sponsor the publication of the article (persons on positions in pharmaceutical companies, associations that have the possibility of granting financial assistance, grants, etc.);
- „Adding“ as a co-author the associates in projects or studies, regardless of quantity or even those with no participation at any stage of the research conducted by the author, either as the project promoter or its participant;
- „Adding“ as a co-author of an article the Editor or a reputable member of the Editorial Board of the journal, whose name can indirectly influence the application process in terms that an article is relatively quickly placed in the reviewing procedure or final publication of the article, regardless of the article quality.

A particular and growing problem today are articles in the form of Guidelines for various diseases written by various professional or scientific associations in which as co-authors appear national representatives in these associations, somewhere even more than 100 names of co-authors, many of whom are not wrote even a letter in that article, or even not even read it before publishing it and gave their written consent. These articles provide co-authors the special benefits of citing these articles, which artificially inflate the values of scientific indexes that validate the authors and coauthors of the article in question. Group authorship may be appropriate when a group of researchers has collaborated on a project, such as a multi-center trial, a consensus document, or an expert panel (9). But, it can be inaccurate and impossible to list all collaborators, and all called “co-authors” need to think about how to communicate credit and responsibility for content of the article (Figure 3).

The phenomenon of “publish at any cost”, as well as the

emergence of undeserved multiple authorship, is a direct result of pressure to secure funding, academic promotion, and/or permanent position, given the fact that the scientific basis for evaluating publications of scientists - the author of the publication. Basically, this phenomenon is the reason for so many malversations in relation to authorship. Surely, the changes in the promotion criteria would probably reduce the number of authorship abuse. The authors, however, easily sign the Author Contribution statement, and that certainly must end. Author of a paper and his/her co-authors must confirm the approval with publication of the manuscript in some journal. The first author must sign agreement on behalf of all co-authors of the manuscript that all of them participated in the writing of manuscript to take public responsibility for it. It is therefore very important to know the criteria for the (co)authorship. Authorship should be based on substantial contribution to the researchers. Corresponding author is not only person who will put his/her ORCID ID or E-mail address, he or she in every situation could be or should be prepared to explain the presence and order of these individuals” (8). Authors must be aware that after the article is accepted for publishing, there is no room for changing the list of authors, adding new authors, which is also a direct violation of all ethical codes of scientific publication (9-11).

## 6. CONCLUSION

The relationship between the author, the mentor, the data processing person, the person providing the moral support etc. must be established, and not all of them has a place in the list of authors, they should be given special places at the end of the article, a space for acknowledgments, where these people may be mentioned. The consciousness of the academic community must change for the purpose of the concrete progress of the academic community and the scientific contributions of its members. Authorship guidelines are not sufficient and need to be upgraded. They are not widely known and may even be ignored by many authors. Also, knowledge about formal authorship criteria is highly variable and majority of scientist are not familiar with existing criteria or do not consider formal criteria necessary. The role of Editors-in-Chiefs of the scientific journals in this case is very important - to follow current criteria, established and proposed by COPE and ICMJE and avoid and prevent of publishing papers with listed co-authors in the article without strictly described what every co-author participated in submitted article which eventually will be accepted for publishing

- **Author contribution:** Izet Masic gave substantial contributions to the conception or design of the work, revising it critically for important intellectual content and gave agreement to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.
- **Conflict of interest:** none declared.

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