



Ellie Kincaid <ellie@retractionwatch.com>

Re - Query from Retraction Watch

Moncef Nehdi <mnehdi@uoguelph.ca>
To: "ellie@retractionwatch.com" <ellie@retractionwatch.com>

Mon, Sep 30, 2024 at 6:07 PM

Hello Ellie,

Your email was forwarded to me by my assistant this morning. Sorry, for answering late in the day. I had several meetings lined up.

First, thanks for reaching out regarding those publications. My mind is in peace with my scholarly work, and I will be happy to answer your inquiry. I will answer based on the information available to me and my recollection of events, though there may be related aspects that I am not aware of.

My research team and I collaborate on research studies with international scholars when we believe that it brings a multi-disciplinary perspective to problem solving and enhances the research outcomes. We try work with scholars that we trust, who can bring additional skills, and who can add strength to the work. However, due to distance, we have no possible direct control over their respective team members and how they manage their contributions to each project. So, we must rely on their professionalism and work ethics. In each study, we collaborate, in good faith, and use our best judgement to ensure that the data is authentic, the scientific basis is robust, and that every co-author has significantly contributed to the work to be published.

For those two retractions (1,2), my understanding is that the issue was not triggered by those two articles, but rather initiated by the finding that a collaborator with one of our international co-authors (who also happens to be a co-author on those two papers) was involved in data manipulation in various publications they co-authored with a reputed scholar in Europe, who is also the editor of a Q1 journal. Elsevier journals apparently started investigating all the other publications in which that person was involved as co-author.

Some of our co-authors for those two papers tried to fight the retraction decision and argued that it did not have any solid basis, but I thought the investigations raised some valid concerns (this should be documented in the related investigations and communications that led to the retraction decisions). Hence, when approached about the issue, I recommended retracting both papers since I believe that retraction is better than keeping in the open literature publications that may have doubt about possible data manipulation or other ethical concerns. I even asked one of the journals to withdraw a paper that was about to be accepted for publication (it was in the second review cycle with minor reviewer comments if my memory is accurate) because it involved the said co-author. I did this without being asked by the journal because of my concerns with this co-author. Again, this should be documented in that investigation.

To be clear, I still believe that our work reported in both studies is sound, but I lost faith in the part of the work contributed by the said co-author, and thus I supported the retraction decisions. The partial evidence I had is that when I asked specific questions to my co-author that were conveyed to me by the journal, they did not produce consistent answers with what I have understood during the paper development and publication process. So, I reported the answers as is to the journals and thought retraction was warranted.

For the paper [flagged on PubPeer](#), I was not aware of this issue, and I have no good reason to doubt the scientific accuracy or ethical standards of the work. We run the model so many times with new data unknown to the model to evaluate its accuracy and it proved excellent. I would be interested to know more about where the information comes from regarding the paper potentially having been advertised as having authorship positions for sale. If there is reasonable doubt that the claim is true, I will take the initiative and ask the journal to retract it.

Unfortunately, as very busy researchers who pursue quality work and abide by high ethical standards within an established culture of research excellence in our reputed institutions, we do not think about issues like these until they sadly happen. We have learned the hard way that collaborating with other scholars who are far away can create some vulnerability. Retracting those papers was an eye opener for me, and I personally have since been trying to learn from the experience to heighten the scrutiny of who we can collaborate with going forward and have declined numerous opportunities to collaborate on research studies for risk mitigation.

Best regards,

Moncef

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I acknowledge with respect and gratitude that the University of Guelph resides on the ancestral lands of the Attawandaron people and the treaty lands and territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit. I recognize the significance of the Dish with One Spoon Covenant to this land and offer respect to our Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee and Métis neighbours.

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