

# A Qualitative Research on Unethical Authorship in Scientific Research

Kürşad Yılmaz

## Introduction

According to studies on authorship rights, authors should take on duties and responsibilities in all stages of research and publication (American Psychological Association [APA], 2017; Arık, 2019; Committee on Publication Ethics [COPE], 2014; Erzan, 2008; Law on Intellectual and Artistic Works [Fikir ve Sanat Eserleri Kanunu], 1951; Yılmaz, 2012, 2015). Unethical authorship can be defined as including non-active contributors among authors, failing to include active contributors, unjustifiably or inappropriately changing the author order, removing the names of those who've contributed actively from a work in later editions, and using one's. Even though he/she does not have an active contribution, using his/her influence to include her name among the authors and arranging the author list in an inappropriate way is also related to unethical authorship (Council of Higher Education [Yükseköğretim Kurulu], 2012, 2014, 2016a; Interuniversity Council [Üniversitelerarası Kurul], 2001, 2019; Scientific and Technological Research Council of Türkiye [Türkiye Bilimsel ve Teknolojik Araştırma Kurumu], 2018; Tur-

@ Prof. Dr., Kyrgyz - Turkish Manas University, kursadyilmaz@gmail.com

ID 0000-0002-3705-5094

➔ Yılmaz, K., (2023). Bilimsel araştırmalarda haksız yazarlık ile ilgili nitel bir araştırma. *İş Ahlakı Dergisi*, 16 (1), ss. 102-136

✎ Research Paper

© İGİAD  
DOI: 10.12711/tjbe/m3991  
Turkish Journal of Business Ethics, 2023  
isahlakidergisi.com

kish Academy of Sciences [Türkiye Bilimler Akademisi], 2002). According to various studies, unethical authorship practices involve common unethical practices (Aydın et al., 2011; da Silva & Dobranszki, 2016; Erdem, 2006; İnci, 2008; Lissoni & Montobbio, 2015; Marusic et al., 2011; Mowatt et al., 2002; Ngai et al., 2005; Union of Teaching Faculty Members [Öğretim Elemanları Sendikası], 2018; Pruschak & Hopp, 2022; Ruacan, 2009; Töreci, 2004). Studies conducted in Turkey have generally addressed unethical behaviors and academic ethical principles. However, I could not find any study that had directly addressed the issue of unethical authorship or its types in Turkey. This study is important in terms of both eliminating the lack of research on the subject and determining the contexts in which unethical authorship practices develop.

### **Method**

This research uses the basic qualitative research design (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). It also uses the maximum diversity sampling method (Patton, 2001) to determine the areas where the research will be conducted, with 49 academicians having been reached. Of the participants, 20 are professor doctors, 13 are associate professors, 11 are lecturers, and 5 are research assistants. The research data were collected using a semi-structured interview form that, in addition to questions about various personal information, includes six open-ended questions. The study uses descriptive analysis (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011) and traditional content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) to analyze the data.

### **Results, Discussion, and Recommendations**

More than half the participants had taken no courses or training on scientific research and publication ethics at either the master's ( $f = 27$ ) and doctorate ( $f = 25$ ) level. None of the eight participants from the field of social sciences had taken any courses or training on scientific research and publication ethics. As some participants stated, significant issue exist related to scientific research and publication ethics education in the Turkish higher education system (Aydın, 2006; Büyüköztürk & Kutlu, 2006; Kansu, 1994; TÜBA, 2002), and some regulations (YÖK, 2016b) have been made in this regard.

Most of the participants ( $f = 33$ ) have not included their names among the authors in any publication where they did not deserve it. However, one important group ( $f = 16$ ) has done this. At least one participant has also done this in all areas. Most people who've added their name to a work have the title of professor doctor

or associate professor and have done this mostly because they are department heads or advisors or because of personal relationships.

The vast majority of academicians participating in this research stated that they have not had their name included among the authors of a work that they did not deserve ( $f = 44$ ). Only five participants stated having had their name added to a work they didn't fully participate in. Participants stated having had their name added to a work under the following conditions: in response to similar help being given before, because of score requirements, or without being aware it had been added.

That the participants stated having added someone else who hadn't deserved it rather than themselves to the list of authors is an interesting result. Ultimately, both behaviors are unethical. However, the participants preferred to say that they had added others who hadn't participated as an author and that they had not been added as an author who hadn't actually participated. This is actually a consistent result with the facts that many of the people had added the title of professor or associate professor and that the people who stated having been added have the title of professor or associate professor.

The participants have a great deal of knowledge about unethical authorship ( $f = 42$ ), with the explanations they made generally being centered on not adequately contributing to a study. However, unethical authorship involves more than just not contributing adequately to a study. Removing contributors from among the listed authors is also considered unethical authorship, and some participants ( $f = 7$ ) had also emphasized this, albeit slightly. Other participants emphasized having undetailed or very general ( $f = 7$ ) knowledge about unethical authorship, stated that they had gained more detailed information from the definitions given in the interview form used in the research.

Participants stated generally considering the contribution rate to an article when determining the order authors are listed ( $f = 49$ ). Participants emphasized the stages of designing the research, participating in the implementations, and reporting to be involved in the order of authors' contributions. Some participants who'd emphasized the importance of the level of contribution stated that cases had occurred where the order of the authors had been determined according to length of service, with the level of contribution coming in third place. Among the participants who emphasized the level of contribution when determining the order of authors, academicians working in the field of Life Sciences and Engineering

Sciences also emphasized experimental studies and laboratory studies as situations specific to their fields. One participant from the field of Life Sciences stated that people had been added to the list of authors who'd assisted with such things as technical and/or theoretical information or interpreting the results related to the experimental studies carried out in the laboratory.

Although more than half the participants had taken no courses or training on scientific research and publication ethics at either the master's or doctoral level, the participants still had a great deal of knowledge about unethical authorship. The participants may have obtained this information from other sources such as seminars, conferences, books, and academic environments. However, courses on scientific research and publication ethics are extremely important in terms of developing an attitude toward scientific research and publication ethics, and these courses should be given due importance in universities.

When considering together those who'd said they had seriously ( $f = 28$ ) or slightly ( $f=15$ ) experienced unethical authorship practices, the majority of participants are seen to have experienced unethical authorship practices. Very few respondents were found to have stated unethical authorship to be uncommon ( $f = 4$ ) or to know nothing about it ( $f = 2$ ). Previous studies in Turkey (Aydın et al., 2011; Erdem, 2006; ÖGESEN, 2018; Ruacan, 2009) have also found unethical authorship to be a common ethical violation. In this sense, the results of the current study overlap with those of previous studies.

According to the participants, the most common forms of unethical authorship are mutual support authorship ( $f = 29$ ), gift/guest authorship ( $f = 23$ ), honorary authorship ( $f = 17$ ), and ghost authorship ( $f = 7$ ). Mutual support authorship is the most common form of unethical authorship and is a general way used to increase one's number of publications. The behavior involved in mutual support authorship can be summarized as "You add me as an author to your paper and I'll add you as an author to mine."

Found among the reasons for unethical authorship arising from the system, which ranks first ( $f = 41$ ) among the participants' reasons for unethical authorship practices, are academic incentive systems, the system's prioritization of quantity over quality, and publication pressure. These reasons also explain the widespread practice of mutual support authorship. These practices generally give importance to quantity over quality. One of the factors that increase mutual support authorship involves people's desire to rise quickly and become famous ( $f = 23$ ). Participants

stated that some academicians had added other academicians to their articles in order to share the fee for publishing articles in paid journals in order to facilitate/accelerate the publication of an article. The belief that mutual support authorship will facilitate the acceptance of a study by making use of the name of a well-known scientist (TÜBA, 2002) can lead to unethical authorship practices, and this situation often happens to research assistants (Günel, 2010).

Another reason participants listed for why academicians tend to commit unethical authorship practices is related to cultural codes ( $f = 19$ ). The hierarchical culture, namely the relations of interest among people, friends, and informal groups in the Turkish higher education system, also cause unethical authorship practices. The hierarchical culture in particular causes subordinates to add superiors to their studies. This explains why gift/guest authorships ranked second among the reasons. Also, one of the main reasons for the topics the participants emphasized in the hierarchical culture sub-theme involves the structure of the higher education system, in which those who are in a higher position are able to make the main determinations regarding issues such as which subordinates to recruit or who can take the exam for an associate professorship.

One of the issues that also arise in this context involves relationships based on self-interest. The participants see relationships based on self-interest, as well as friendship relations, as one of the reasons for unethical authorship practices and also occurs among the reasons that increase mutual support authorship practices. Concepts the participants frequently emphasized such as friendship, benefit, and loyalty are completely culture-specific and point to a cultural situation called relational culture. Generally, relational culture is based on the fact that the business and transactions carried out in institutions are based on personal relations and, as a result, bring some nepotistic relations and favoritism to the agenda. In fact, some participants stated being a relative or being married to also cause unethical authorship. That kinship and marital relations are cited as reasons for unethical authorship practices is interesting but not surprising. Nepotistic relations are experienced intensely in the Turkish higher education system, and experiencing some unethical authorship practices as a result of such relations is normal.

Some participants cited some informal group relations ( $f = 3$ ) as one of the cultural code-related reasons for unethical authorship. Participants expressed social/religious/political groups such as religious communities or associations as informal groups and stated that some academicians had practiced unethical authorship in order to support these groups. İnci (2008) stated that groups can form hidden

agreements in different centers where the names of one group are added to the work of the other and that supporting non-scientific research and publication affiliations (e.g., ideological or political groups) to also be a factor in these groupings.

The last theme related to the reasons for unethical authorship is the lack of information on the subject or the normalized acceptance of unethical authorship ( $f = 6$ ). The fact that some academicians stated a lack of knowledge to exist regarding unethical authorship may also be related to the fact that almost half of the participants had not taken any courses or training on scientific research or publication ethics at either the master's or doctoral level. This also shows parallelisms with the fact that some of the participants had emphasized having undetailed or very general knowledge about unethical authorship.

As a result, the following suggestions can be made to researchers and policymakers:

- Research can be done examining the field of health sciences.
- Research can be conducted to investigate the relationship between unethical authorship practices and hierarchical culture in universities.
- Studies should be carried out to raise awareness about scientific research and publication ethics.
- Despite being part of a much larger problem, arrangements should be made to change the hierarchical culture in universities.
- Regulations such as the academic incentive system and appointment promotion regulations should be arranged in a way that prioritizes quality rather than quantity.
- Arrangements should be made to prevent relational cultural elements such as relationships based on self-interest, friendship relations, or informal group relations in the higher education system from being determinative.

## Kaynaklar

- American Psychological Association-APA, (2017). Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct. <https://www.apa.org/ethics/code/>. Erişim Tarihi: 20.03.2020.
- Arık, R. S. (2019). Haksız yazarlık ve diğer etik ihlal türleri. K. Yılmaz ve R. S. Arık (Ed.). *Bilim ve Araştırma Etiği* içinde (s. 109-120). Ankara: Pegem Akademi Yayıncılık.
- Aydın, İ. (2006). Sosyal bilimlerde araştırmadan yayına etik değerler. K. Karakütük (Ed.). *Sosyal Bilimlerde Süreli Yayıncılık – 2006* içinde (s. 71-80). Ankara: TÜBİTAK Yayını.
- Aydın, İ., Demirkasımoğlu, N. ve Alkın, S. (2011). Türkiye’deki kamu üniversitelerinde görev yapmakta olan öğretim üyelerinin akademik etik ilkeleri benimseme ve bu ilkelere meslektaşlarının uyma düzeylerine ilişkin görüşleri. *TÜBİTAK Projesi*. Proje No: 109K594.
- Büyüköztürk, Ş. ve Kutlu, Ö. (2006). Sosyal bilim araştırmalarında yöntem sorunu. K. Karakütük (Ed.). *Sosyal Bilimlerde Süreli Yayıncılık – 2006* içinde (s. 113-122). Ankara: TÜBİTAK Yayını.
- Committee on Publication Ethics-COPE (2014). *What constitutes authorship? COPE Discussion Document*. COPE Council, 9 June 2014. [publicationethics.org](http://publicationethics.org).
- da Silva, J. A. T. ve Dobranszki, J. (2016). Multiple authorship in scientific manuscripts: Ethical challenges, ghost and guest/gift authorship, and the cultural/disciplinary perspective. *Science and Engineering Ethics*, 22(5), 1457-1472. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11948-015-9716-3> PMID: 26507204.
- Erdem, R. (2006). Çok yazarlı bilimsel çalışmalarda yaşanan etik problemler. II. *Uygulamalı Etik Kongresi*. Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi, 18-20 Ekim 2006. Ankara.
- Erzan, A. (2008). Yayın ahlakı. A. Erzan (Ed.). *Bilim Etiği Elkitabı* içinde (s. 35-45). Ankara: TÜBA Yayını.
- Fikir ve Sanat Eserleri Kanunu-FSEK (1951). 5846 Sayılı Fikir ve Sanat Eserleri Kanunu. *Resmi Gazete*. Tarih: 13/12/1951, Sayı: 7981. <https://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/mevzuatmetin/1.3.5846.pdf>.
- Günal, İ. (2010). Yayın etiği ve sorunları. *Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi Hemşirelik Yüksekokulu Elektronik Dergisi*, 3(1), 54-56. [http://www.deu.edu.tr/UploadedFiles/Birimler/18280/54-56\\_pdf.pdf](http://www.deu.edu.tr/UploadedFiles/Birimler/18280/54-56_pdf.pdf). Erişim Tarihi: 12.10.2012.
- Hsieh, H. F. ve Shannon, S. E. (2005). Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative Health Research*, 15, 1277-1288.
- İnci, O. (2008). Bilimsel yayında yazarlık ve yazarlıkta etik sorunlar. *Türk Üroloji Dergisi*, 34(1), 108-112.

- Kansu, E. (1994). Bilimsel yanıtma ve önlenmesi. *Dünya'da ve Türkiye'de Bilim, Etik ve Üniversite* (s. 71-75). TÜBA Bilimsel Toplantı Serileri.
- Lissoni, F. ve Montobbio, F. (2015). Guest authors or ghost inventors? Inventorship and authorship attribution in academic science. *Evaluation Review*, 39(1), 19-45. doi:10.1177/0193841x13517234.
- Marusic, A., Bosnjak, L. ve Jeronic, A. (2011). A systematic review of research on the meaning, ethics and practices of authorship across scholarly disciplines. *PLoS ONE*, 6(9), e23477. DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0023477.
- Matzinger, P. ve Mirkwood, G. (1978). In a fully H-2 incompatible chimera, T cells of donor origin can respond to minor histocompatibility antigens in association with either donor or host H-2 type. *Journal of Experimental Medicine*, 148, 84-92.
- Merriam, S. B. ve Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative Research*. San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons.
- Mowatt, G., Shirran, L., Grimshaw, J. M., Rennie, D., Flanagan, A. vd. (2002). Prevalence of honorary and ghost authorship in Cochrane reviews. *JAMA*, 287(21), 2769-2771. doi: 10.1001/jama.287.21.2769.
- Ngai, S., Gold, J. L., Gill, S. S. ve Rochon, P. A. (2005). Haunted manuscripts: Ghost authorship in the medical literature. *Accountability in Research*, 12, 103-114.
- Öğretim Elemanları Sendikası-ÖGESEN (2018). *Akademik Mobbing ve Akademik Etik Saha Çalışması*. <https://www.ogesen.org/genel/akademide-mobbing-de-var-akademik-etik-ihlali-de-var/>
- Patton, M. Q. (2001). *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods* (3<sup>th</sup> Edition). London: Sage.
- Pruschak, G. ve Hopp, C. (2022). And the credit goes to . . . - Ghost and honorary authorship among social scientists. *PLoS ONE*, 17(5), e0267312. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0267312>
- Ruacan, Ş. (2009). Araştırma ve yayın etiği. *Türk Anatomi ve Klinik Anatomi Derneği*. [www.anatomiderneği.org/belge/yayinetigi.ppt](http://www.anatomiderneği.org/belge/yayinetigi.ppt). İndirme Tarihi: 12.10.2012.
- Töreci, K. (2004). Yayın etiği. *ANKEM Dergisi*, 18(1), 67-88.
- Türkiye Bilimler Akademisi-TÜBA (2001). TÜBA'dan Bilim Etiği Konusunda Kamuoyu Duyurusu. 14 Aralık 2001. <http://www.tuba.gov.tr/tr/etik/888.html>. Erişim Tarihi: 20.01.2012.
- Türkiye Bilimler Akademisi-TÜBA (2002). *Bilimsel Araştırmada Etik ve Sorunları*. Ankara: TÜBA Yayını.
- Türkiye Bilimsel ve Teknolojik Araştırma Kurumu-TÜBİTAK (2018). *TÜBİTAK Araştırma ve Yayın Etiği Kurulu Yönetmeliği*. Karar Tarihi: 07.11.2015. Karar No: 247 sayılı toplantı.



- Üniversitelerarası Kurul-ÜAK (2001). Etiğe aykırı davranışlar. İndirme Tarihi: 20.03.2003.
- Üniversitelerarası Kurul-ÜAK (2019). *Üniversitelerarası Kurul Bilimsel Araştırma ve Yayın Etiği Yönergesi*. Karar Tarihi: 19.12.2019. Karar No: 248 sayılı toplantı kararı.
- Yıldırım, A. ve Şimsek, H. (2011). *Sosyal Bilimlerde Nitel Araştırma Yöntemleri* (8. Baskı). Ankara: Seçkin Yayınevi.
- Yılmaz, K. (2012). Editörden: Etik dışı davranış olarak haksız yazarlık. *Eğitim Bilimleri Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 1(2). [http://ebad-jesr.com/Vol2No1\\_Editoryal.pdf](http://ebad-jesr.com/Vol2No1_Editoryal.pdf).
- Yılmaz, K. (2015). Bilimsel araştırma etiği ve haksız yazarlık. M. Kurt, R. Nacar ve C. Elitaş (Ed.). *Akademik Araştırma ve Etik* içinde (s. 151-184). Ankara: Gazi Kitabevi.
- Yükseköğretim Kurulu-YÖK (1981). *Yükseköğretim Kanunu*. Resmî Gazete. Tarih: 4.11.1981, Sayı. 17506. <https://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/MevzuatMetin/1.5.2547.pdf>. Erişim Tarihi: 25.02.2020.
- Yükseköğretim Kurulu-YÖK (2012). *Yükseköğretim Kurulu Bilimsel Araştırma ve Yayın Etiği Yönergesi*. Karar Tarihi: 29.08.2012. Karar No: 2012.18.946.
- Yükseköğretim Kurulu-YÖK (2014). *Yükseköğretim Kurumları Etik Davranış İlkeleri*. Ankara: YÖK. <https://www.ankara.edu.tr/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2015/01/etik-davran%C4%B1%C5%9F-ilkeleri.pdf> Erişim Tarihi: 25.02.2020.
- Yükseköğretim Kurulu-YÖK (2016a). *Yükseköğretim Kurumları Bilimsel Araştırma ve Yayın Etiği Yönergesi*. Yükseköğretim Kurulu Başkanlığı Genel Kurul Kararları. Oturum Tarihi: 10.11.2016. Oturum No: 23. Karar No: 2016.23.497.
- Yükseköğretim Kurulu-YÖK (2016b). *Lisansüstü Eğitim ve Öğretim Yönetmeliği*. Resmî Gazete. Tarih: 20.04.2016. Sayı: 29690.