

Publication Ethics and Publication Malpractice Statement

Purpose and Scope

The *African Journal of Reproductive Health (AJRH)* is committed to maintaining high standards of research integrity, publication ethics, transparency, and editorial independence. This Publication Ethics and Publication Malpractice Statement applies to authors, editors, reviewers, editorial board members, and other persons involved in the publication process.

AJRH follows internationally recognised principles of publication ethics and has adopted best-practice principles recommended by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE). The journal is committed to protecting the integrity of the scholarly record and to investigating suspected research and publication misconduct before and after publication.

Responsibilities of Authors

Authors are responsible for ensuring that submitted manuscripts:

- represent original work;
- have not been published previously, in whole or in substantial part;
- are not under consideration for publication elsewhere;
- accurately report the research undertaken;
- contain sufficient methodological information to permit appropriate evaluation;
- acknowledge relevant sources and contributions;
- comply with applicable ethical requirements;
- disclose relevant funding and conflicts of interest; and
- comply with the journal's authorship and submission requirements.

All authors must approve the submitted manuscript and accept responsibility for the work attributed to them.

The AJRH Author(s) Guarantee Form requires authors to confirm that they have made sufficient contributions to the manuscript and that the work has not previously been published or submitted elsewhere.

Originality, Duplicate Publication and Redundant Publication

Manuscripts submitted to AJRH must be original and must not be under consideration by another journal. Authors must disclose any closely related manuscripts, previous publications, conference papers, reports, datasets, preprints, or other material that could create concerns about duplicate or redundant publication. Where substantial overlap is identified, the editors may request clarification, correction, withdrawal, rejection, or other appropriate action.

Plagiarism and Text Recycling

AJRH does not accept plagiarism, including direct copying, mosaic plagiarism, patchwriting, inappropriate text recycling, or substantial use of another person's work without appropriate acknowledgement.

AJRH investigates suspected plagiarism both before and after publication.

In accordance with the journal's existing plagiarism policy, cases assessed as minor plagiarism may be referred to the author for correction. More extensive plagiarism may require an explanation from the author and may result in rejection, withdrawal, restriction on future submissions, correction, or retraction as appropriate.

Where plagiarism is identified in a published article, AJRH may retract the article and take appropriate steps to correct the scholarly record.

Research Ethics and Ethical Approval

Research involving human participants must comply with applicable ethical standards.

AJRH requires manuscripts reporting research involving human participants to state that the research received approval from the appropriate institutional ethics review body or equivalent committee. The manuscript should identify the approving institution and, where applicable, provide the approval date and approval/reference number.

AJRH requires research involving human participants to be conducted consistently with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki and subsequent amendments or comparable internationally recognised ethical standards.

Where ethical approval was not required, authors should provide an appropriate explanation.

Informed Consent and Confidentiality

Authors must obtain appropriate informed consent from research participants where required.

Where manuscripts contain information, images, or other material that could identify an individual participant, authors must obtain appropriate consent for publication unless an applicable ethical or legal exception exists.

Authors must protect participant confidentiality and must not disclose unnecessary identifying information.

Authorship and Contributorship

Authorship must reflect substantial intellectual or scholarly contributions to the work.

All listed authors should:

- have made a meaningful contribution to the research or manuscript;
- have participated in drafting or critically revising the manuscript;
- have approved the final version; and
- accept responsibility for the integrity of the work.

Individuals who do not meet the requirements for authorship should not be listed as authors merely because of position, supervision, funding, or administrative involvement.

The journal does not permit ghost, guest, or honorary authorship.

Any authorship dispute should first be addressed by the authors and, where necessary, the relevant research institution. AJRH may request documentation concerning authorship and contributorship.

Conflicts of Interest

Authors, reviewers, editors, and editorial board members must disclose relationships or interests that could reasonably be perceived as influencing the research, review, editorial decision, or publication. Potential conflicts may include financial relationships, employment, consultancy, grants, personal relationships, academic competition, intellectual interests, or other circumstances that could affect impartiality.

Editors and reviewers must recuse themselves from handling manuscripts where a significant conflict of interest exists.

Funding and Sponsorship

Authors must disclose sources of financial support for the research and publication.

Funding information should identify the funding organisation and, where appropriate, the role of the funder in study design, data collection, analysis, interpretation, manuscript preparation, or the decision to submit the manuscript.

AJRH's existing author guidance requires funding sources to be acknowledged.

Editorial Responsibilities

Editors are responsible for making fair, objective, and evidence-based editorial decisions.

Editorial decisions should be based primarily on the scholarly quality, originality, relevance, methodological soundness, ethical integrity, and contribution of the manuscript. Editors must not discriminate against authors on the basis of irrelevant personal characteristics or affiliations.

Editors must maintain confidentiality concerning submitted manuscripts and must not use unpublished information for personal advantage.

Editors must investigate credible allegations of misconduct and take appropriate action where concerns arise.

Peer Review

AJRH uses peer review to assess the scholarly quality and suitability of submitted manuscripts.

Reviewers must:

- provide objective and constructive assessments;
- maintain confidentiality;
- identify relevant published work that has not been cited where appropriate;
- disclose conflicts of interest;
- decline reviews where they lack appropriate expertise;
- avoid using unpublished information for personal or professional advantage; and
- alert the editor to suspected plagiarism, duplicate publication, fabrication, falsification, or other serious concerns.

Reviewers should not contact authors directly about a manuscript under review unless authorised by the journal.

Editorial Independence and Confidentiality

Editorial decisions must remain independent of commercial, financial, political, or personal interests.

Information obtained during editorial assessment or peer review must remain confidential.

Manuscripts must not be shared with unauthorised persons or used for purposes unrelated to the editorial process.

Research and Publication Misconduct

AJRH considers the following to constitute serious research or publication-integrity concerns:

- fabrication of data;
- falsification or manipulation of data;
- plagiarism;
- substantial text recycling;
- duplicate or redundant publication;
- manipulation of the peer-review process;
- inappropriate authorship;
- undisclosed conflicts of interest;
- failure to obtain required ethical approval;
- inappropriate use or disclosure of confidential participant information;
- deliberate citation manipulation;
- false statements concerning research or publication history; and
- other practices that materially undermine the integrity of the scholarly record.

Handling Allegations of Misconduct

Allegations may arise before or after publication.

AJRH will assess credible allegations and may request explanations or supporting documentation from authors, reviewers, institutions, or other relevant parties.

Where appropriate, AJRH may contact the author's institution or other responsible body for investigation.

The journal will maintain confidentiality during investigations to the extent reasonably possible.

Editorial decisions concerning publication, correction, withdrawal, or retraction will be based on the available evidence and the effect of the concern on the reliability and integrity of the scholarly record.

Corrections, Retractions and Expressions of Concern

AJRH will correct the published record when an error is identified that affects the accuracy or interpretation of an article.

A correction may be issued where a limited error can be corrected without invalidating the main findings or conclusions.

A retraction may be issued where an article contains unreliable findings, serious ethical violations, substantial plagiarism, fabricated or falsified data, or other problems that materially compromise the reliability of the publication.

An Expression of Concern may be published where serious concerns exist but the available evidence is insufficient for an immediate correction or retraction, particularly while an investigation is ongoing.

Retraction notices should clearly identify the reason for retraction and remain linked to the original article where technically possible.

Article Withdrawal and Removal

Before publication, an accepted or submitted manuscript may be withdrawn where appropriate and in accordance with journal procedures.

After publication, AJRH will normally correct or retract an article rather than remove it from the scholarly record.

Complete removal of a published article will be considered only in exceptional circumstances, such as where the article creates a serious legal, privacy, or safety risk that cannot adequately be addressed through a correction or retraction notice.

Any removal decision should be documented and authorised by the appropriate editorial authority.

Complaints and Appeals

Authors may raise legitimate complaints concerning editorial procedures, peer review, publication decisions, or possible breaches of journal policy.

Complaints should be submitted to the journal through its designated editorial communication channel and should include sufficient information to permit investigation.

Appeals against editorial decisions should provide a clear explanation of the grounds for appeal and, where applicable, identify a substantive error in the editorial or peer-review process.

A disagreement with an editorial decision alone does not necessarily constitute grounds for an appeal.

Complaints and appeals should be handled fairly, confidentially, and without prejudice to the complainant.

Artificial Intelligence and Generative AI

Authors remain responsible for the accuracy, originality, integrity, and ethical compliance of manuscripts submitted to AJRH.

Generative AI tools may assist with activities such as language improvement or administrative support where appropriate, but AI tools must not be listed as authors.

Authors should disclose substantive use of generative AI in manuscript preparation where such use affects the content or intellectual development of the work.

Authors remain responsible for verifying all AI-assisted content, references, quotations, data, and interpretations.

Editors and reviewers must not upload confidential manuscripts or unpublished material into generative AI systems where doing so would compromise confidentiality or intellectual property.

AI-generated content must not be used to fabricate references, data, results, images, or other research evidence.

Research Data and Transparency

Authors are responsible for ensuring that reported data and research materials are accurate and appropriately documented.

Where ethical, legal, confidentiality, or intellectual-property restrictions permit, authors are encouraged to make relevant supporting data or materials available.

Authors should be prepared to provide reasonable clarification or supporting information to the editors where concerns arise regarding the reliability of published findings.

Citation and Reference Integrity

Authors must accurately acknowledge sources used in their work.

References must support the claims for which they are cited.

Authors and reviewers must not engage in inappropriate citation practices intended primarily to increase citation counts.

Editors and reviewers must not require authors to cite articles solely to increase the journal's citation metrics.

Post-Publication Discussion

AJRH recognises the importance of scholarly discussion after publication.

Where appropriate, the journal may consider letters, comments, corrections, responses, or other post-publication communications concerning published articles.

Post-publication concerns will be assessed according to their credibility and potential effect on the reliability of the scholarly record.

Publication Charges

AJRH currently charges a publication fee for accepted manuscripts. The applicable charge is communicated to authors through the journal's author information.

Payment of a publication charge does not influence editorial decisions concerning acceptance or rejection.

Ethical Framework

AJRH's publication-ethics policies are informed by internationally recognised publication-ethics principles, including the Core Practices and guidance of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE). The journal will periodically review its publication-ethics policies and update them where necessary to reflect developments in research integrity, publishing standards, technology, and applicable ethical requirements.