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Conflicts of Interest in the Research Publication Process-A Case Study Approach

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Abstract

Purpose: A conflict of interest is defined broadly as a scenario in which one's responsibilities and self-interest collide in a manner that has a significant probability of corrupting one's discernments, motivations, actions, desires, values, and judgments. This study aims to investigate various cases of conflict of interest. **Research design, data and methodology:** Our study used the preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analyses (PRISMA) to identify resources. The eligibility of selected prior studies thoroughly was investigated whether they are suitable for the topic of present study. Finally, we collected total 15 previous studies published between 2000 and 2021. **Results:** Research findings indicate that there are three main cases that might cause a conflict of interest and mandated research ethics education might provide researchers with the tools to identify and battle the temptations and biases provided by conflicts of interest. Researchers could likely be better prepared for conflicts of interest if they investigated the moral difficulties associated with them in advance. **Conclusions:** Researchers might evade deliberate or unconscious detriment of duties, and also objectivity loss because of the siren song of self-interest by escaping situations whereby they may be tempted to shirk their responsibilities, not to remark the hassles of unveiling conflicts.

Keywords : Conflict of Interest, Research Ethics, Case Study Approach

JEL Classification Codes : C35, I23, O30

1. Introduction[*]

A conflict of interest is defined broadly as a scenario in which one's responsibilities and self-interest collide in a manner that has a significant probability of corrupting one's discernments, motivations, actions, desires, values, and judgments. To narrow down the conflicts of interests to study, the Association of American Medical Colleges defines a conflict of interest as "circumstances in which monetary or other individual considerations might compromise, or seem to compromise, a researcher's professional verdict in steering or reporting research. Everyone has to cope with a conflict of interest. Conflicts of interest can be found in all aspects of life, including edification, business, administration, finance, and research (Foronda, Alfes, Dev, Kleinheksel, Nelson Jr, O'Donnell, & Samosky, 2017). It has the potential to influence our thoughts, verdicts, choices, and pronouncements. Identifying oneself in a conflict of interest is not integrally unethical. Instead, the critical point is whether or not one detects a conflict of interest and how one deals with it. Conflict of interest in ethics refers to an individual who is constantly complex and exposed to difficulty when it comes to performing duties, requirements, and responsibilities that reflect their beliefs, values, and interests. It might also apply to a situation in which the person in charge must compromise or seem to compromise on initial ideals and objectives (Foronda et al., 2017). As a result, in this situation, an individual contests their interests, and one must choose one of the several perks. Having loyalty to both sides, though, makes it more difficult. As a result of

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this struggle, people find it challenging to make a significant choice and, as a result, fail to reach a solid conclusion.

COIs in research are a source of worry for at least two reasons. Frist, COIs can jeopardize the integrity of study; and secondly, COIs can erode public trust in science (Nie, Xie, Chen, & Cong, 2020). A developing body of research indicates how financial interests can jeopardize research integrity. According to studies, there is a clear positive association between the source of funding and the outcomes of research: most published studies sponsored by pharmaceutical corporations tend to support the companies' goods. It is hardly unexpected that firms publish research that promotes their products (Nie et al., 2020). What is concerning is that there is an indication that firms occasionally bend or disobey scientific rules to attain favorable findings. Businesses (or others) might manipulate the research course in various manners to suit their needs.

Moreover, conflicts of interest are vital in research for it provides the subsequent three types of risks in general. For starters, conflicts of interest might skew researchers' observations and inferences. It may jeopardize their scientific objectivity due to bias. Conflicts of interest, maybe more regularly and significantly, may jeopardize researchers' ability to discern their responsibilities, to recognize what is correct and incorrect (Cherla, Olavarria, Bernardi, Viso, Moses, Holihan, & Liang, 2018). Conflicts of interest, in other words, can lead to bad decisions due to distorted moral judgment. Third, researchers are vulnerable to erroneous action due to a lack of willpower. They may consciously abdicate responsibilities for selfish reasons (Cherla et al., 2018). Generally, conflicts of interest cause persons to perceive what they desire to see, believe what makes them feel comfortable, and compromise their values, undermining scientific practice.

Besides, conflicts of interest occur when writers, reviewers, or copyreaders possess interests that are not wholly disclosed and may impact their verdicts on what is published.' They have been labeled as those that, if revealed later, would lead a reasonable reader to believe they had been misled or duped. Many scholars, researchers, and professionals may have possible conflicts of interest that could affect – or be perceived to affect – their research (Grundy, Mayes, Holloway, Mazzarello, Thombs, & Bero, 2020). As a result, several journals need a formal disclosure of conflicting interests, which allows a statement to be included within the paginated printed paper. Conflicts of interest upsurge the chance of biases developing; they can affect research superiority and the public good (even if revealed).

2. Cases of Conflicts of Interest

2.1. Web of Responsibilities

Conflicts of interest jeopardize all elements of research. The entire research process is threatened, from selecting a study delinquent to research design, recruiting and treatment of investigation subjects, data analysis, and peer-review of publications and grant applications. Investigation misconduct, data embezzlement, unsuitable authorship designation, mistreatment of humanoid and animal subjects, abuse of students, and other issues are commonly discussed in Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR) texts, sessions, and journals. However, these issues arise since researchers conflict with interest circumstances (Grundy et al., 2020). Conflict of interest isn't a minor issue in some research areas; it is a significant issue with far-reaching implications for RCR.

Researchers are caught up in a web of responsibilities to other persons, groups, organizations, and initiatives. They are the recipients of numerous benefits. Education and expert activities are significantly funded for them. They are handsomely compensated in terms of position, authority, and flexible schedules, in addition to compensation, fringe benefits, and bonuses. In exchange, researchers are obligated to defend and advance society's interests in various ways. Scientists are also part of a massive collaborative endeavor that spans thousands of kilometers and decades (Ioannidis & Trepanowski, 2018). As participants, they are responsible for respecting scientific ideals (for example, objectivity in the search for knowledge) and contributing to the broader scientific effort. Researchers must also fulfill their obligations to their collaborators, financial patrons, and readers. Researchers who are also instructors in a university context have significant responsibilities to their scholars, colleagues, managers, and institutions (Cherla et al., 2018). Furthermore, researchers have a responsibility to safeguard the interests of their investigation subjects, whether they are humans, creatures, or holistic entities like families, communities, administrations, or ecosystems.

These responsibilities frequently clash with the diverse goals of researchers. Investments, industry benefits, and consulting fees are examples of monetary ambitions. Publications, funding, tenure, and elevations are other career goals. Replying to peer and managerial pressure, networking, and friend-making are all examples of social desires (Cherla et al., 2018). Avoiding inconveniences and delays, as well as retaining productivity, are all time-management goals. And, of course, everybody wishes for additional resources and opportunities to pursue their dreams.

Hence, cases of conflicts of interest when performing

research usually arise when these duties and interests collide in significant ways. Financial conflicts of interest that fulfill our comprehensive definition might take various forms (consultancies, monetary investments). Investigators in industry-funded investigation initiatives, for example, may benefit financially from breaking their overall commitment to scientific objectivity (Resnik & Elmore, 2018). Nonfinancial conflicts of interest, on the other hand, fit our description. Conflicts of interest arise, for instance, when referees are enquired to examine papers from colleagues, acquaintances, or direct competitors (Resnik & Elmore, 2018) or when investigators stand to earn status by publishing bogus research. Thus, conflicts amid duties and nonfinancial desires might be more prevalent and severe than battles between responsibilities and financial goals.

2.2. Becoming Negligence

Another case of destructive conflict of interest when conducting research is when the researchers become negligent of the recognizable conflicts of interests. Negligence is demarcated lawfully as a "letdown to exercise the standard of overhaul that a reasonably reasonable person would have undertaken in a comparable situation. However, in a broader sense, negligence refers to the failure to exercise reasonable care in the recital of moral duty. In this sagacity, researchers who fail to take appropriate steps to address conflicts of interest in their personal life are negligent. Also, people assume that being tempted is not intrinsically ethically deficient. Individuals who merely sin in their souls are not wrongdoers (Neill, Martin, & Harris, 2020).

Conversely, simply performing properly and remaining impartial in the face of a conflict of interest is not adequate. People are obligated to reduce and manage temptation and prejudice since they offer significant moral hazards. Negligence is defined as the deliberate performance of risky activities or omissions when better options are accessible (Neill et al., 2020). Entering a conflict-of-interest scenario on purpose without a good reason is a dangerous act. Continuing in a conflict-of-interest state minus taking proper safeguards is a dangerous omission. Just as it is immoral to drive ninety mph in a school zone, even though no one is hurt, or to consent a loaded handgun on the coffee table when the nationals bring their infantile over to play, even though it is not settled, it is immoral to do nothing concerning latent conflicts of interest when one would be proactive (Besley, Zahry, McCright, Elliott, Kaminski, & Martin, 2019). Investigators can make mistakes without losing their neutrality or breaking their responsibilities simply by permitting themselves to enter or endure conflict of interest situations minus sufficient preparation due to their negligence. This possesses severe consequences that can be avoided.

2.3. Position to Impact Research

Likewise, conflicts of interest in investigation emerge when university associates have a position to impact study, and their extramural actions are such that they or their household may profit financially or unfairly from the research. Conflicts of interest possess the potential to improperly impact many elements of research, including how a study is intended, how data is collected, processed, and published, and who is involved in the work (Antonelli & Coopersmith, 2018). Conflicts of interest are unavoidable in university research, particularly one that encourages technology transfer and entrepreneurial activities. Subsequent is an instance of the related conflict of interest. Dr. Karl is the CEO of a startup that uses advanced technologies in her CMU lab. She holds an equity stake in the corporation and receives compensation from it. This has anything to do with Dr. Karl's institutional duty (Antonelli & Coopersmith, 2018). These financial interests must be made public. They might or might not be a conflict of interest.

A determination that a researcher possesses a conflict of interest does not mean that the individual is immoral or has committed a crime. Such judgments presume that some situations are widely acknowledged to provide an unacceptable danger that decisions will be excessively affected by factors that must be irrelevant. After these states have been identified, institutes manage or eliminate them to maintain the integrity of the research course. However, problems can occur when a COI happens and is dealt with similarly by the institute to which the discrete owes primary loyalty. There have been several situations at institutions where researcher COI has played a crucial role in the current past. In addition to possibly injuring study participants and bringing research results into doubt, the COI and resulting inherently unfavorable publicity have placed both the individual investigators engaged and their home institutes in an unwelcome spotlight.

Two examples demonstrate this: From 2000 to 2007, Harvard School child psychiatrist Joseph Biederman, MD, earned a minimum of $1.6 million in consulting fees from drug companies but did not record much of this revenue to Harvard officials, potentially violating internal university rules and also the federal regulations (Flier, 2017). From 2000 to 2007, Emory University psychiatrist Charles Nemeroff, MD, the primary investigator on an NIH trial of five GlaxoSmithKline antidepressants, earned at least $2.8 million in consultancy fees from pharmaceutical corporations, including GlaxoSmithKline (Flier, 2017). He did not report one-third of these fees to Emory. Allegations

of investigator COI at Harvard and Emory occasioned reputational damage to both the personal physicians implicated and their organizations (Flier, 2017). Furthermore, in instances like this, civil and criminal accusations may be filed, and these are some of the cases of lousy conflict of interests.

Also, the cases include instances when an academic work in a business (for example, as a consultant, manager, or advisor) and may be interested in influencing administration or other policy, a superior editorial locus with a commercial journal is held by an academic who simultaneously serves on a University library committee that promotes journal subscriptions. Also, COI can exist across roles as a researcher and a treating physician for similar study subjects.

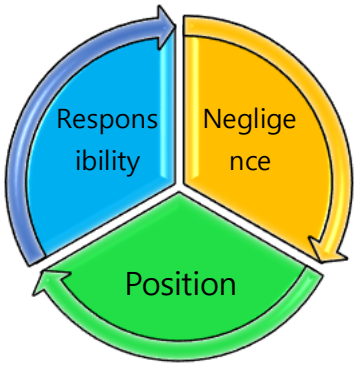

Figure 1: Primary Casees in the conflict of Interest

3. Discussion

Some believe that unimpaired individuals who yield to temptation are entirely and totally to blame. Others appear to be interested in countering this viewpoint by emphasizing the professional demands on researchers and the social framework that causes the scenario. Many philosophers respond to this by proposing professional- and institutional-level techniques for eliminating conflict of interest, i.e., ideas for action by expert societies, business groups, governmental agencies, institutions, and so on. I completely agree with this line of supposed. We all agree that the constraints on academics are enormous and that professional and even institutional practices are to blame for a big deal of conflict of interest. Professional and institutional measures for eliminating conflicts of interest should be pursued. Nonetheless, there is enough responsibility to go around for individuals to bear some of the blame for their acts. Hence, below are some of the methods of addressing conflicts of interest.

One method of addressing conflict of interest at the professional level while conducting the research could be to redesign the profession so that various types of perverse incentives are eliminated or reduced (Hauray, Boullier, Gaudillière, & Michel, 2021). Decreasing the pressure on investigators to get tenure and grants could most likely assist. Reducing the proportion of research initiatives supported by industry may also be beneficial. While these proposals sound desirable and should be adopted to the degree possible, one can be skeptical that they will alleviate the delinquent of conflict of interest. Minor changes to the occupation would have a negligible impact. The only radical restructuring may have a significant effect. Various radical improvements have been proposed, but they are ill-defined, impracticable, or radical non-starters (Truijens & Hanegraaff, 2021). Concrete, pragmatic, and politically viable solutions for reforming the profession to moderate conflict of interest are uncommon. Such reforms are unlikely to occur shortly, possibly because they contradict many vested interests and the scientific community's inertia.

Another solution that has been proposed is to standardize the researchers. Perhaps conflicts of interest would be reduced if investigators are encouraged to avoid conflicts of interest whenever possible, lessen, monitor, and reveal them when essential. They are sanctioned by expert administrations, government agencies, businesses, and universities when they do not (Lewicka-Strzałecka, 2018). Providing disincentives for investigators to enter conflict of interest circumstances, and when a conflict of interest is inevitable, requiring disclosure and watching of the battle could aid to reduce the dangers such cases pose by holding researchers answerable and warning readers to be extra cautious of certain types of distortions.

Moreover, mandated research ethics education might provide researchers with the tools to identify and battle the temptations and biases provided by conflicts of interest. Researchers could likely be better prepared for conflicts of interest if they investigated the moral difficulties associated with them in advance. This could presumably let ethically trained researchers create informed conclusions. Requiring this type of instruction also establishes a robust moral tone on an institutional level, telling distinct researchers that their institute takes conflicts of interest utterly.

4. Conclusion

The investigator's mantle is presently passed down from cohort to generation through the practice of mentorship. Counselors teach less knowledgeable researchers the ins and outs of study by role modeling and providing precise, day-to-day comments on whatever comes up. It is already-in-place mentorship practice may be the most effective

mechanism for resolving the problem of conflict of interest. Since experienced researchers have dealt with conflicts of interest in their lives, they are uniquely qualified to assist junior colleagues and students in recognizing, avoiding, and managing conflicts of interest. Mentors should therefore teach mentees how to prevent and manage conflicts of interest in addition to usual research standards (Easley, 2017). Despite the fact that some mentors now provide no or incorrect advice about conflicts of interest (deteriorating the delinquent), the mentoring process offers the best opportunity of alleviating the delinquent of conflict of interest.

Even if expert-level changes would be implemented efficiently, addressing them with most investigators is ineffective. Because few people can have a meaningful impact on the research profession, such conversations are pointless. Furthermore, they provide no immediate control to researchers in dealing with conflicts of interest in their lives. Nonetheless, researchers must address the conflicts of interest they encounter, if only to avoid neglect (Nichols-Casebolt & Macrina, 2019). Nothing is an ethically acceptable option, relying on chance and conscience. To begin filling this void, some of the techniques for dealing with conflict of interest on an individual level are as follows. Individual researchers should avoid conflicts of interest wherever possible. This is the most straightforward and most effective technique. Researchers might evade deliberate or unconscious detriment of duties, and also objectivity loss because of the siren song of self-interest by escaping situations whereby they may be tempted to shirk their responsibilities, not to remark the hassles of unveiling conflicts and bias suspicion, by avoiding circumstances in which they may be tempted to shirk their responsibilities. There are numerous options. For instance, if one declines all contact with drug salespeople, it is not difficult to deny their offers.

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