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Fake papers with real authors, but unaware of the publication: how to fight, respond to and adapt to "forged authorship" / identity theft

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A researcher notices that they are listed as an author of an article in a journal, without their knowing. It quickly turns out that the paper is not only of low quality, but probably fake and AI-generated, or containing plagiarism and published in a predatory journal. This practice of forged authorship seems to be on the rise, and may constitute a criminal act of "identity theft". Also problematic is the misuse of institutional affiliation: fake papers with names of non-existing "authors" from reputable institutions. Both actions put individual and institutional reputations at stake.

This has nothing to do with a lack of integrity of professional researchers, working in an institutional framework of accountability. Quite to the contrary: These practices seem to be run by criminals abroad, who find ways to exploit the system of scientific publishing for financial gain.

The motive for adding the name of respected scholars as authors of fake papers, or institutes as fake affiliations? Presumably an act of the publisher to pad out the page count and make the journal appear more reputable. Some also hypothesize that enemy colleagues may submit fake papers under the victim's name.

We have been involved in resolving various cases of forged authorship and pirated affiliation in three countries, and will shortly share the testimonies of these cases and some perspectives. The second part will be a discussion with the audience on how to respond to and fight this seemingly growing form of research crime. For example:

(1) How can the research community respond to this malpractice? What do "victims" of these identity theft practices need? What can they do themselves, and how can institutions support them? Should victims add a disclaimer in their cv, warning for fake papers in their name? Where should we raise awareness for this new type of fraud? How can the Retraction Watch Database help?

(2) How will we fight these criminal practices? As long as there is close-to-zero risk of being caught or sanctioned, we cannot expect these sinister journals and practices to fade out. How are responsibilities distributed between funders, the publishing industry and organisations representing the scientific community? Which role can we expect of public prosecutors of countries? What can be done at the international level?

[1] Orally Ivan, 'Perplexed' author's identity forged on plagiarized paper in 'probably fake' journal, Retraction Watch, June 2024, <https://retractionwatch.com/2024/06/14/perplexed-authors-identity-forged-on-plagiarized-paper-in-probably-fake-journal/#more-129395>

[2] Kincaid Elly, 'Still angry': Chemist finds his name on a study he didn't write, Retraction Watch, January 2025, <https://retractionwatch.com/2025/01/13/chemist-martin-mcphillie-journal-biochemical-technology/>

[3] Sohn Rebecca, One year later, bioinformatics journal with unclear leadership yet to retract plagiarized article, october 2023, <https://retractionwatch.com/2023/10/02/one-year-later-bioinformatics-journal-with-unclear-leadership-yet-to-retract-plagiarized-article/>