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Shared Responsibility to Address Questionable Research Practices? – A Study of Perceived Efficacy of Organisational Research Integrity Policies

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In response to widespread concerns about research integrity, recent years have seen numerous efforts to safeguard against research misconduct and questionable research practices. Such efforts have taken many forms and have been implemented at all levels of the research systems. Among the key actors involved in implementing such efforts are research performing organisations. These play a significant role in designing, implementing, and enforcing research integrity policies for the researchers they employ. However, while much effort has been put into designing organisational research integrity policies, little is known about the effectiveness of these in changing researcher behaviour. To inform the discussion about the effectiveness of these policies, this study investigates the ability of organisations to change researchers' behaviour through the perspective of the researcher.

We do so by analysing data from the International Research Integrity Survey (IRIS), a survey of researchers in Europe, Canada, Australia, and the USA, collected as a part of the SOPs4RI project. This dataset includes survey responses from more than sixty thousand active researchers who answered questions about their experiences with and views on research integrity. Participants were sampled from a list of all identifiable authors in publications between 2016 and 2020 indexed in web of science.

To analyse the impact of organisational research integrity policies, we investigate whether researchers' perceptions of their organisations' research integrity policies relate to the degree to which they engage in questionable research practices. Results show that awareness of policies, evaluations of the effectiveness of policies, as well as confidence in their organisations' research integrity policies all relate to lower levels of engagement in questionable research practices. However, we also find that this relationship is highly sensitive to both researchers' research integrity self-confidence and their general attitudes towards research integrity. As such, we find substantial evidence that individual and organisational levels interact in forming researcher behaviour. We interpret this as evidence that organisations' policy efforts can influence researcher behaviour, but that this influence is contingent on researcher acceptance and empowerment.