

An overlooked ethics issue of excluding student researchers without justification

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Dear Editor,

We wish to highlight a critical yet frequently neglected ethics issue in academic research: the exclusion of student contributors from the authorship of research papers.

This exclusion is often not due to a lack of involvement, because students often play crucial roles in data collection and analysis, manuscript development and logistic support. However, as the publication process progresses, decisions regarding authorship are often made without clear communication or transparency. Students, therefore, find themselves omitted from the list of authors and excluded from relevant discussions without any reason or explanation (1). This unspoken form of exclusion is unethical and harmful to educational and professional growth (2).

The practice of excluding students from the list of authors contradicts the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) guidelines, which recommends that anyone who has made significant contributions to research should be included as an

author. Exclusion discourages students and gives the impression that their intellectual efforts can be exploited without accountability. The psychological effects on students can be profound, ranging from feelings of betrayal to demotivation to a lasting mistrust in academic collaboration. This contradicts the aim of enhancing research capacity and promoting ethical scholarship at the regional level (3).

I call on academic institutions in the Eastern Mediterranean Region to establish clear policies regarding authorship for research projects involving students (4). Transparent agreements should be made at the beginning of each project to define the expectations and criteria for authorship. The policy should also include penalties for unfair exclusion.

Academic integrity in research should be upheld through guidelines and practices that protect the most vulnerable participants particularly the enthusiastic students who are often not acknowledged (5).

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