

## Scientific Publications among Novice Researchers: Dilemma to Decision and a Way Forward

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The first medical journal of Nepal, Journal of Nepal Medical Association, was a landmark in the mid of nineteenth century which opened doors for scientific publication in biomedical research.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, in 1982 Government of Nepal established Nepal Health Research Committee under Ministry of Health which was later changed to Nepal Health Research Council (NHRC) through an act of parliament in 1991.<sup>2</sup> Amidst several other scientific journals in the country, NHRC also started publishing its scientific journal - Journal of Nepal Health Research Council since 2002. At present, there are over 100 scientific journals that are being published annually, biannually or quarterly in the country.<sup>3</sup> Apart from that, every year numerous studies are conducted by amateur researchers of different faculties as a part of their academic work. However, a large chunk of those scientific works fail to come out to the scientific world. They either get shelved in the graduates' bookcases or in the university libraries and their numeric results exist only in the resume of the researchers. Only a handful of research papers find its way towards the path of publication. The rest fails the very first step of research communication - to be published in a scientific community which could then be expected to result in bringing changes in people's lives. It seems the true potential of scientific research has been undermined which is to benefit local and global science and make difference in the lives of people. At the moment most research has been found to be established only as a regular and obligatory part of academia.

Research is a daunting task even for seasoned professionals, and it is even tougher for beginners. Research values and culture might have been undermined in the Nepali context due to a limited understanding of research among young researchers early in the career. That could be the result of a lack of guidance from more seasoned researchers or of understanding it as a seasoned work that only most seasoned people are capable of undertaking. Scientific research is a long

journey and the accountability of one's research work remains throughout the career, even after publication. Lack of understanding of true nature of scientific journey leads to research misconduct in different forms. This often leads to malpractice such as falsification and fabrication of data, and plagiarism that in turn arise doubts on validity, and reliability of the whole study.

Inappropriate topic, unplanned research, and weak methodology are some of the issues that are encountered in the work of novice researchers. Even the smarter ones skip all these barriers, they are again stuck in the tedious task of publication process where the researchers themselves are the only mentor left to deal with all the hardship. Not knowing how to overcome "the writer's block" is also a major frustration faced by new authors.<sup>1</sup> Certain skills such as formatting, making changes to meet the journal requirements for manuscripts, scientific writing formats and many more skills need to be mastered before making submissions to the scientific journals. Yet, submission in itself is not the end of the journey. Along with it comes several revisions, tedious peer review, delayed approvals, ethical issues, and at times even rejections.<sup>4</sup> The grit of a true researcher is tested during the scientific journey.

A scientific experiment or study, no matter how spectacular the results are not complete until the results are published.<sup>5,6</sup> In fact, investment on such studies is unjustified if they are not published or their findings do not reach the wider community. That is why the slogan of "Publish or Perish" is common among researchers.<sup>6,7</sup> Unfortunately, research conducted in universities of Nepal, specifically, often take the path to perish, which clearly signifies that research culture is way far behind in the country. Majority of senior faculties are not habituated to conducting research with a scientific rigor and publishing them and find it hard to start at later stage of their lives. Ironically, some of them publish their work just to obtain academic designation and thereafter

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leave forever. Neither such faculties would teach nor encourage their students to engage in research to generate new knowledge and publish them. This scenario is generating the same pool of people without adequate knowledge of research and publication; therefore, a vicious cycle is likely to continue.<sup>1</sup>

Therefore, it is high time that academic institutions start making changes to their curriculum, making basics of research and publications mandatory and also making appropriate changes to meet the requirements of global scientific community. Rather than just producing more quantities of research, there is a need for more academicians of quality, research guides, review board members and mentors, as the central focus of improvement in order to develop fine researchers and thereby produce quality publications in the future. Undoubtedly, students find journey to publication turbulent. However, guidance and support to them through capacity building by research experts and mentors on aspects such as scientific communication, maintaining research integrity, style and format of writing, statistical analysis, ethical aspects and so on can act as cornerstone in facilitating the process. Efforts only from academic institutions and journals are not enough though. These issues need to be addressed with high priority in collaboration with academia, health institutions, journals, research experts, line ministries - most importantly the policy makers, programme managers and other relevant stakeholders.

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