



# Authorship Misconduct and Academic Pressure: An Empirical Study on Unethical Research Practices in Higher Education

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## Abstract

The increasing emphasis on academic publishing as a performance metric has significantly influenced research culture in higher education. In many institutions, publication output is closely associated with recruitment, promotions, and performance evaluation, creating substantial pressure on researchers. This study examines the relationship between academic pressure and unethical research practices, particularly focusing on authorship misuse, ghostwriting, and paper purchasing.

A quantitative survey was conducted among 19 participants, including faculty members, postgraduate students, and PhD scholars. The findings reveal that 73.7% of respondents experience pressure to publish research papers either consistently or occasionally. While a majority (84.2%) reported awareness of research ethics and publication guidelines, a significant proportion (78.9%) admitted to observing unethical practices such as paid authorship and paper purchasing.

The study further identifies key contributing factors to such practices, including lack of research skills (42.1%), time constraints (21.1%), academic pressure (21.1%), and easy availability of paid services

(15.8%). These findings highlight a critical gap between ethical awareness and practical implementation.

The study concludes that unethical research behavior is often driven by systemic issues rather than intentional misconduct. Institutional reforms, structured training in research methodology, and balanced evaluation systems are essential to promote ethical research practices. This study contributes to empirical research on academic misconduct within the context of developing academic environments.

## Keywords

Academic Pressure, Research Ethics, Authorship Misconduct, Ghostwriting, Paper Purchasing, Research Integrity



## 1. Introduction

In the contemporary academic environment, research publications have become a primary indicator of professional success. Institutions increasingly rely on publication metrics for recruitment, promotions, and rankings, leading to the emergence of a “publish or perish” culture (Kearney et al., 2024).

While research output is essential for knowledge dissemination, excessive pressure has contributed to unethical practices such as plagiarism, ghostwriting, and paid authorship (Craciun, 2024). These practices undermine the credibility of academic research and raise concerns regarding research integrity.

In developing countries such as India, the issue is further intensified by limited research training, heavy teaching workloads, and institutional expectations. Many researchers lack adequate methodological knowledge, which may lead to unethical shortcuts such as paper purchasing or inappropriate authorship inclusion (Alam et al., 2023).

This study aims to explore the relationship between academic pressure and unethical research practices using empirical data.

## 2. Literature Review

Academic integrity has gained increasing attention in recent years. Studies indicate that institutional pressure significantly influences unethical research behavior (Kearney et al., 2024).

Jha (2024) highlights that unclear authorship guidelines often result in practices such as honorary authorship. Similarly, Alam et al. (2023) emphasize that lack of formal training in research ethics contributes to misconduct.

The emergence of paper mills and paid publication services has further complicated the research ecosystem (Craciun, 2024). Meho and Akl (2024) report an increase in unconventional authorship practices globally.

Additionally, the integration of artificial intelligence introduces new ethical challenges, requiring updated frameworks for research integrity (Pellegrina & Helmy, 2025).

## 3. Research Gap

Existing studies primarily focus on general research ethics, with limited empirical research addressing emerging unethical practices such as paper purchasing and paid authorship in developing academic environments. This study attempts to bridge this gap.

## 4. Methodology

### 4.1 Research Design

The present study adopts a **quantitative research design** to systematically examine the relationship between academic pressure and unethical research practices in higher education. A structured questionnaire-based approach was employed to collect measurable data from respondents. This design was selected as it allows for statistical interpretation of responses and facilitates the identification of patterns, trends, and correlations between variables such as academic pressure, ethical awareness, and misconduct behavior.

The study follows a **descriptive and exploratory approach**, as it not only quantifies responses but also explores emerging unethical practices such as paid authorship and paper purchasing within the academic context.



## 4.2 Data Collection

Primary data for this study was collected through an online survey using a structured questionnaire. The survey was distributed among **19 participants**, comprising faculty members, postgraduate students, and PhD scholars from higher education institutions.

A **convenience sampling method** was used due to accessibility constraints and time limitations. Although the sample size is relatively small, it provides preliminary insights into the perceptions and experiences of respondents regarding academic pressure and research ethics.

The data collection process was conducted over a specific period, ensuring that participants had adequate time to respond. Responses were recorded digitally, which ensured accuracy and ease of analysis.

## 4.3 Survey Design

The questionnaire was carefully designed to capture multiple dimensions of the research problem. It consisted of both **closed-ended and multiple-choice questions**, enabling quantitative analysis.

The survey instrument included the following key sections:

- **Academic Pressure:**  
Questions aimed at understanding whether respondents feel pressure to publish research papers and the frequency of such pressure.
- **Publishing Motivations:**  
This section explored the primary reasons behind publishing research, including personal interest, institutional requirements, career advancement, and academic obligations.
- **Awareness of Research Ethics:**  
Questions assessed the level of awareness among respondents regarding research ethics, authorship guidelines, and publication standards.
- **Observation of Unethical Practices:**  
Respondents were asked whether they have encountered practices such as paper purchasing, ghostwriting, or paid authorship.
- **Causes of Misconduct:**  
This section identified key factors contributing to unethical behavior, such as lack of research skills, time constraints, academic pressure, and easy access to paid services.

The questionnaire was kept concise to encourage participation while ensuring coverage of all relevant aspects of the study.

## 4.4 Data Analysis Techniques

The collected data was analyzed using **descriptive statistical methods**, primarily percentage analysis. The results were visually represented using **pie charts** to enhance clarity and interpretation.

Each response category was converted into percentage values, enabling easy comparison across variables. The use of graphical representation helped in identifying trends and patterns in respondent behavior and perceptions.



#### 4.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards were strictly maintained throughout the research process. Participation in the survey was **completely voluntary**, and respondents were informed about the purpose of the study.

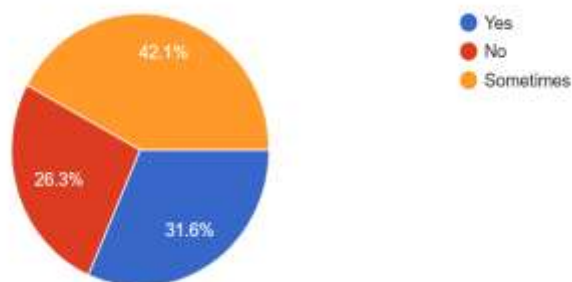
No personally identifiable information was collected, ensuring **anonymity and confidentiality** of all participants. The data collected was used solely for academic purposes and was not shared with any third party.

Additionally, respondents were given the freedom to withdraw from the survey at any stage, ensuring adherence to ethical research practices.

#### 5. Results and Analysis

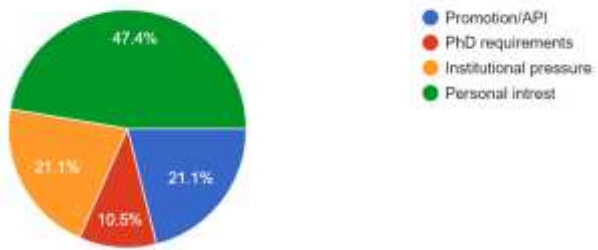
Table 1: Demographic Distribution

Category	Percentage
Faculty	73.7%
Students	21.1%
PhD Scholars	5.3%



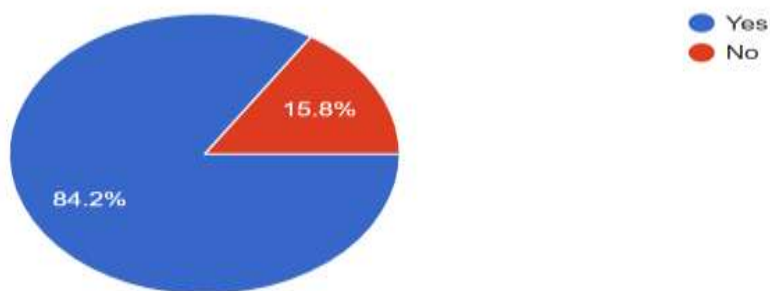
Yes – 31.6% | Sometimes – 42.1% | No – 26.3%

Figure 1: Academic pressure experienced by respondents



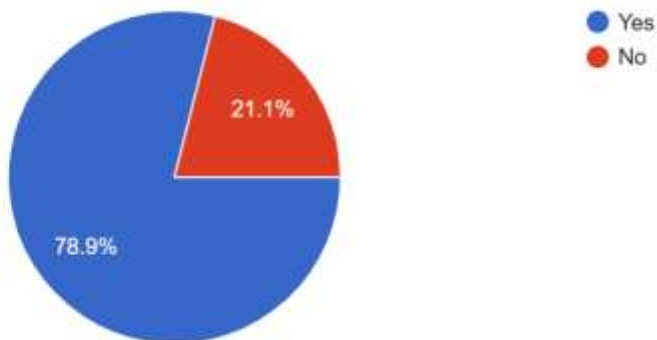
Personal Interest – 47.4% | Promotion/API – 21.1% | Institutional Pressure – 21.1% | PhD – 10.5%

Figure 2: Motivations for publishing research papers



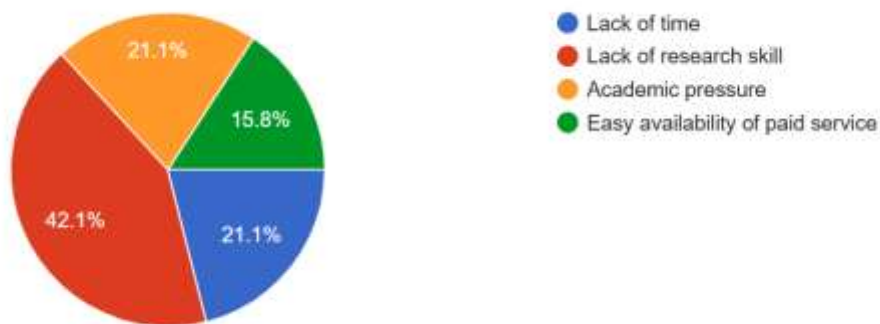
Yes – 84.2% | No – 15.8%

Figure 3: Awareness of research ethics



Yes – 78.9% | No – 21.1%

Figure 4: Observations of unethical research practices



Lack of Skills – 42.1% | Time – 21.1% | Pressure – 21.1% | Easy Access – 15.8%

Figure 5: Factors contributing to unethical practices

## Analysis

The findings indicate that academic pressure is prevalent among respondents, with 73.7% experiencing pressure either frequently or occasionally. Although awareness of research ethics is relatively high (84.2%), the high percentage of respondents observing unethical practices (78.9%) suggests a disconnect between knowledge and practice.

The primary causes identified include lack of research skills, time constraints, and academic pressure. These results indicate that unethical practices are largely driven by systemic issues rather than intentional misconduct.

## 6. Discussion

The results support existing literature indicating that publication pressure negatively affects research integrity (Kearney et al., 2024). The gap between awareness and implementation highlights the need for practical training programs.

The widespread observation of unethical practices suggests structural issues within academic systems. Performance-based evaluation systems and lack of mentorship contribute significantly to this problem (Craciun, 2024).

The growing role of digital tools and artificial intelligence further complicates ethical considerations, necessitating updated regulatory frameworks (Pellegrina & Helmy, 2025).

## 7. Limitations and Future Scope

### Limitations

- Small sample size
- Self-reported responses
- Limited generalizability



## Future Scope

- Larger-scale studies
- Comparative institutional research
- AI and research ethics studies
- Policy development

## 8. Conclusion

The present study highlights the growing prevalence of unethical research practices within higher education, particularly in the context of increasing academic pressure. The findings clearly indicate that a significant proportion of researchers experience pressure to publish, which in turn influences their research behavior. While a majority of respondents reported awareness of research ethics and publication guidelines, the simultaneous observation of unethical practices such as paid authorship and paper purchasing reveals a critical gap between ethical knowledge and its practical implementation.

The study further demonstrates that unethical research practices are not solely the result of intentional misconduct, but are often driven by systemic and structural challenges. Factors such as lack of research skills, limited time, institutional expectations, and easy availability of paid publication services contribute significantly to the problem. This suggests that the issue extends beyond individual responsibility and reflects broader weaknesses within the academic ecosystem.

These findings emphasize the urgent need for a more balanced and supportive research environment. Academic institutions must shift their focus from quantity-driven evaluation systems to quality-oriented research assessment. Additionally, there is a strong need for structured and continuous training programs in research methodology and ethics, particularly for early-career researchers and students.

To address these challenges, the study recommends the implementation of mandatory research ethics training, reform of performance evaluation systems, and the establishment of transparent mechanisms for monitoring publication practices. Encouraging mentorship, collaboration, and ethical awareness can further strengthen research integrity.

In conclusion, ensuring ethical research practices is essential for maintaining the credibility, reliability, and global reputation of academic institutions. Addressing the root causes of unethical behavior through institutional reforms and capacity-building initiatives will play a crucial role in fostering a responsible and sustainable research culture.

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#### **About Author:**

Minakshi Vasant Tambe, am an Assistant Professor in the Department of Computer Science at S.M.B.S.T. College of Arts. Science & Commerce Sangamner. With 13 years of teaching experience in Computer Science, I am deeply committed to advancing both education and research in the field. I hold a Master's degree in Computer Science (First Class) and have qualified the NET and SET in Computer Science, reflecting my academic rigor .My research contributions include numerous articles published in reputed journals, focusing on artificial intelligence, data mining and GEN AI. Passionate about fostering innovation, I actively engage in scholarly discussions through FDPs, Conferences and Workshops, aiming to bridge theoretical knowledge with practical applications. My teaching philosophy emphasizes student-centric learning, critical thinking, and the transformative potential of technology.