

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Understanding Research Integrity: Analysis of Retracted Health Sciences Articles from Jordanian Institutes

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Abstract

Background: The recent attention highlighted on healthcare research has pressured researchers to publish high volume of articles to enhance personal benefits, forcing some of them to use unethical practices to withstand in a such competitive environment, falling in “publish or perish” pressure. Consequently, there was a global rise in the number of articles retractions, which is one of the parameters utilized in “RI² Research Integrity Risk Index”. Most Jordanian universities were classified as red-flag according to RI². Our objective is to analyze retracted Jordanian-affiliated health-sciences articles to help Jordanian institutions to assess and prevent unethical practices and improve integrity policies.

Methods: All retracted health-sciences articles with at least one affiliation with a Jordanian institute were extracted from the Retraction Watch Database. The articles were double screened for information about the number of Jordanian authors and their affiliations, along with information from the database. Retraction notes were reviewed to identify and classify the retraction reason(s). Authors were further classified by academic status. Descriptive statistics and data analysis were done using Microsoft Power BI.

Results: A total of eighty-two articles were included; most were original research (n=62). Sixty-two papers involved international coauthors, and 48 were first-authored by Jordan-affiliated researchers. Out of total of 537 total authors, 143 were affiliated with Jordanian institutes. Retractions were heavily time-clustered, with 81.7% (n=67) occurring in 2021–2024. At the journal level, Cureus accounted for the largest single count (n=15), most (n=12) were case reports. Number of retractions per institution was as follows: Jordan University of Science and Technology (n=22), Amman Arab University (n=12), Ajloun National University (n=10), and the University of Jordan (n=9). We identified 16 retractions involving undergraduate authors without documented same-institution faculty supervision; 12 of which were case reports. Retractions were attributed to inadequate peer review (n=45), concerns about content/data (n=43), followed by paper-mill/authorship-for-sale (n=15), plagiarism (n=6), publisher error (n=4) and approval issues (n=2). And “others” (n=6).

Conclusions: The study analyzed retracted health research in Jordan to uncover the main causes and suggest ways to strengthen research integrity. It found a marked rise in retractions after 2020 and highlighted links with student projects and open-access publishing. The authors recommend using the RI² index as an early warning tool (not a stigma) and encouraging quality-over-quantity rewards to reduce pressure on researchers and students.

Keywords: Research Integrity, Retracted Articles, Health Sciences, Jordanian Research Institutions.

1. INTRODUCTION

The importance of scientific research has been increasingly recognized by governments, public and private institutions, especially universities and healthcare institutions. This recognition had directed healthcare leaders and policy makers towards the engagement of research in the academic and healthcare fields, which had a profound influence on identifying priorities, reducing costs and enhancing both the quality of health care and patient's outcome. Consequently, research productivity became a major factor in these institutions' decision-making processes, with the volume and consistency of publications serving as the primary metrics [1]. Accordingly, many institutions rely on the number of publications as a primary factor for the promotion to a higher academic rank and provide financial incentives for each publication. All of these factors added increasing pressure on researchers to publish more papers for their academic advancement which may led to deviant behaviors and irresponsible practices to increase the number of publications, a phenomenon called "Publish or Perish" [2]. Researchers are frequently pressured to participate in and publish rapidly on trending issues like COVID-19 or Artificial intelligence, which may increase the chance for their paper to get cited [3]. Therefore, researchers tend to publish only positive results, and therefore similar findings become more frequent in the literature, making these results very difficult to be reproduced and falling in the swirl of "replication crisis" [4]. The pursuit of some researchers for easy and fast publication contributed to unethical practices such as plagiarism, manipulating data, faking peer review, duplicating publication, and selling authorships. Such

practices can lead to the waste of resources and can destroy public trust in literature which will eventually damage the reputation of individual researchers and their institutions.

Measuring the number of retractions has become increasingly important over time. In 2010, the Retraction Watch (RW) website was established [5]. Also, in 2024, Dr. Ioannidis included the number of retractions in RW database in the annual dataset he compiles of the highly cited researchers in Scopus [6]. As many university rankings are concerned with productivity and citation volume, they may overlook some doubtful practices, for example, researchers who publish in predatory journals, or those manipulating citations through self-citations, inflating output through multi-affiliations, and accrediting intellectual leadership to external authors [7,8].

For these reasons, the number of retractions per institute's publications was used by Professor Lokman Meho to form the equation of the Research integrity Risk index (RI²). This equation ends with a numerical product that can be translated into one of five risk tiers from high risk (Red Flag) to low Risk to assess the research integrity in an institutional level [7]. The results of the RI² Research integrity Risk index were published as preprint and in its website [7]. The minister of higher education and research in Jordan had expressed his dissatisfaction with these results, as five of Jordanian universities were classified as Red Flag, indicating extreme anomalies or systemic integrity risks, two were classified as orange, indicating a High Risk, and one was classified as yellow, indicating a Watch List or emerging concerns, while no university was classified as green, which is the expected global variance, or white, which represents adherence to integrity principles. The

minister of higher education and research also stated that these results were due to researchers who rely on AI models, and falsify and steal scientific research, and universities who pay for conference participation, advertising, and even compensating researchers to publish under the university's name [9]. These statements sparked wide-ranging discussions and debates within Jordan's academic circles. Opinions were divided between those who consider them accurate and call for a swift search for solutions, and those who see them as exaggerated and argue that it is inappropriate to rely on an index that has neither been officially recognized nor undergone sufficient review, as this could harm the reputation of educational institutions in Jordan.

The aim of this study was to provide in-depth analysis of retracted health sciences papers affiliated with Jordanian universities and institutes. Consequently, providing a clearer vision for Jordanian institutes to assess

and plan to take action to prevent unethical practices in research, to reduce the number of retractions and to improve integrity policies within Jordanian institutions.

2. METHODS

Data on retracted publications from Jordanian institutions were extracted from the Retraction Watch Database (RW) (accessed in sept 2025) [10], including only articles classified under health sciences and affiliated with Jordanian institutions. A double-screening process was conducted. For each retracted article, information on publication total number of authors, and the number of Jordanian authors was collected, and the retraction notices were reviewed to determine the exact reason for retraction, then categorized as in Figure.1. If any retraction notice was not available or clear, the journal/publisher was contacted. Jordan's research output from 2000 to September 2025 was extracted from Scopus to generate Figure 3(B).

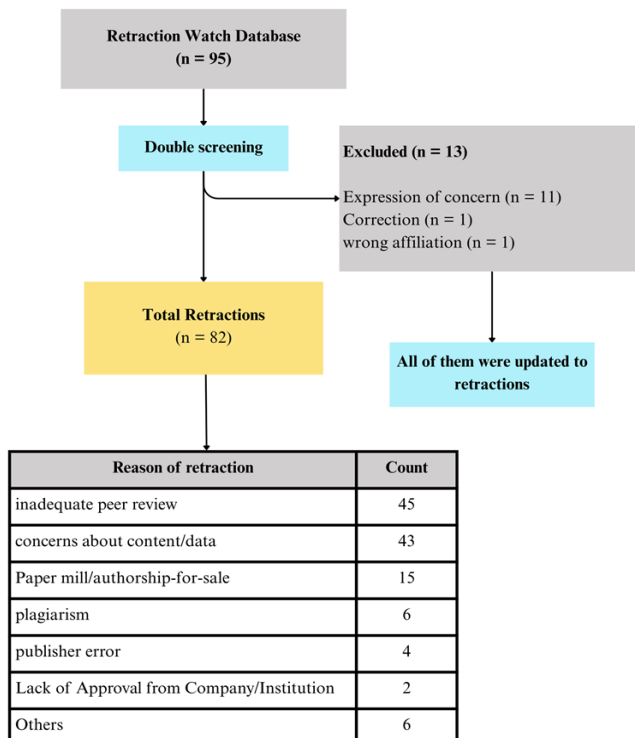


Figure 1. Flow diagram of the screening process and classification of retraction reasons.

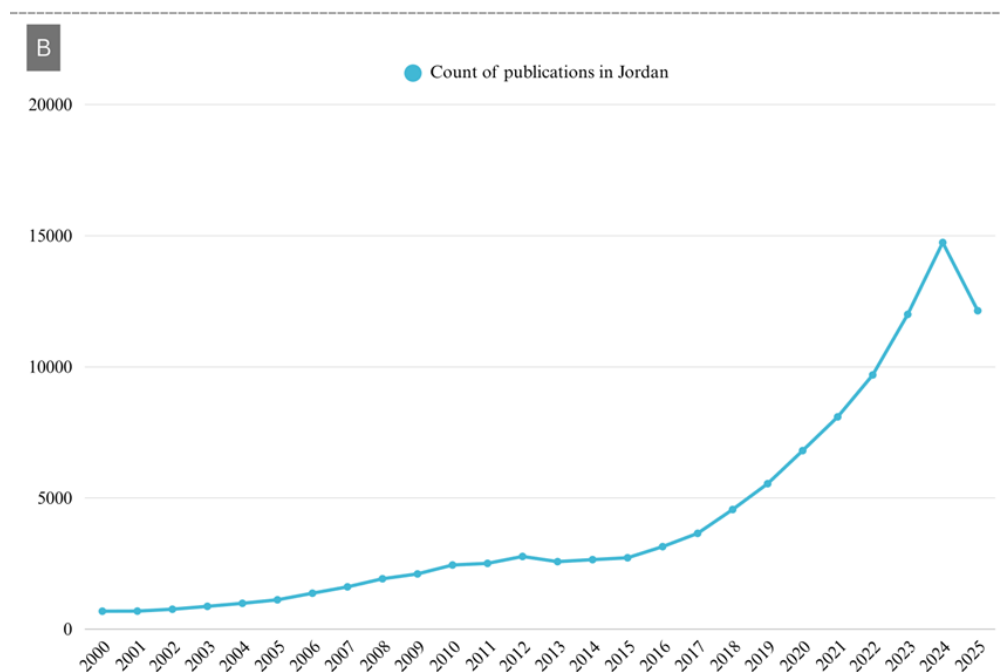


Figure 3. (A) Trend of retracted papers' year of publication & year of retraction in RW (2001-September 2025). (B) research output in Jordan in Scopus (2000 - September 2025).

Jordanian authors were further classified by academic status, and undergraduate students at the time of the publication were identified through cross-referencing publicly available information on professional social media platforms, such as LinkedIn, and the electronic university system. The main Jordanian universities or institutions for each researcher were also identified, and the totals for each were calculated. Data analysis was performed using Microsoft Power BI [11], with descriptive statistics used to summarize publication characteristics.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Characteristics of the retracted papers

The RW database includes 178 Records of papers with authors affiliated with Jordanian institutes, 95 records were categorized as health sciences papers

records. However, 11 records were “Expression of concern”, 1 record was “Correction”, and 1 record was from another country but was mistakenly categorized as Jordanian by the author/journal. All “Expression of concern” and “Correction” papers records were updated to “Retraction” with new record ID in RW database. After exclusion of non-retraction records, 82 retracted health sciences articles are included in this paper, the majority of them (62 out of 82) were original research. Moreover, 81(98.8%) retracted papers were published in open-access publishing models. The first paper was published in 2001, and the first retraction was in 2008. A significant majority of retractions (81.7%, 67 papers) were published between 2021 and 2024 (four-year period). Figure.3(A) visually illustrates the trend of retracted papers' year of publication & year of retraction.

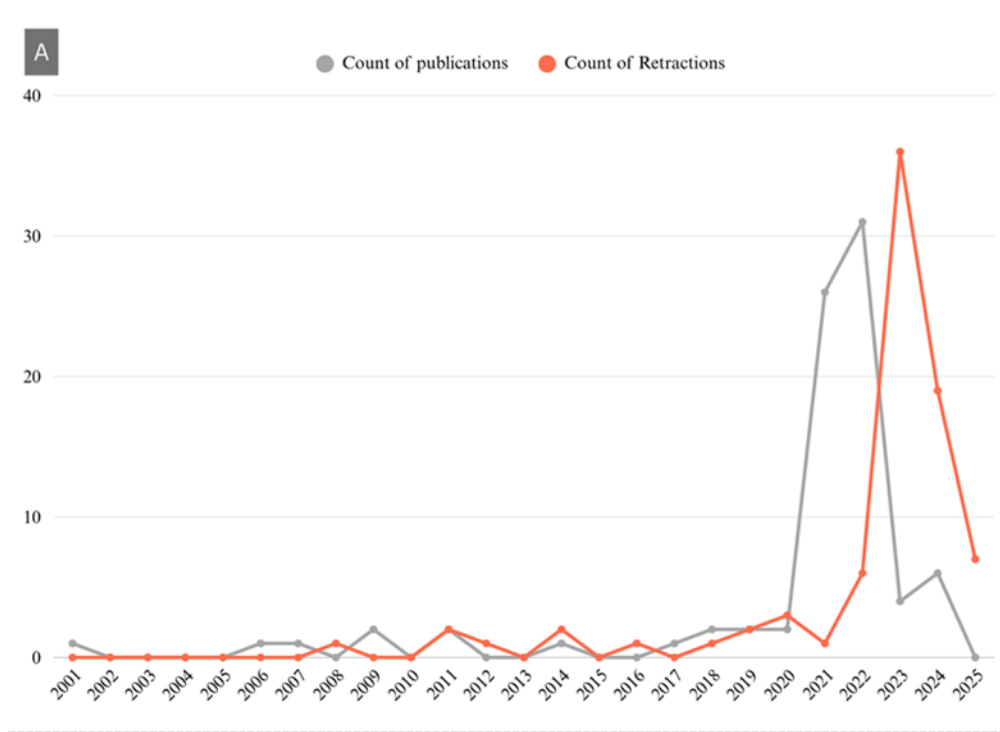


Figure 3. (A) Trend of retracted papers' year of publication & year of retraction in RW (2001-September 2025). (B) research output in Jordan in Scopus (2000 - September 2025).

Notably, the journal *Cureus* (which became part of Springer Nature in December 2022) had the highest number (15 out of 82) of retracted papers, 12 of them were case

reports, and all retractions were during 2024 and 2025. (Table.1) shows the details of the retracted papers, and (Table.2) shows the journal/publisher distribution.

Table.1

		Count
Article type	Research article;	62
	Case report;	12
	Review article;	7
	Conference abstract/paper;	1
International		62
Jordan only		19
Double affiliation		1

Table.2 publishers & journals of the retracted papers.

Publisher	Journal	Count of retractions
Cureus (part of springer nature as of December 2022)	Cureus	15
Elsevier	The journal of prosthetic dentistry	1
	Neuroscience research	1
	Annals of medicine and surgery	1
	Asian pacific journal of tropical disease	1
Elsevier - cell press	Heliyon	1
Emerald	Business process management journal	1
Frontiers	Frontiers in plant science	1
Galenos publishing	Journal of the Turkish German gynecological association	1
Hindawi (bought by Wiley January 2021)	Computational and mathematical methods in medicine	7
	Journal of healthcare engineering	6
	Applied bionics and biomechanics	6
	Computational intelligence and neuroscience	6
	Wireless communications and mobile computing	4
	Mobile information systems	2
	Biomed research international	2
	Bioinorganic chemistry and applications	1
	Adsorption science & technology	1
	Mathematical problems in engineering	1
	Journal of nanomaterials	1
Ios press (bought by sage November 2023)	Journal of intelligent & fuzzy systems	1
MDPI	Nutrients	1
	International journal of environmental research and public health	1
SAGE publications	Proceedings of the institution of mechanical engineers. Part h, journal of engineering in medicine	2
	Concurrent engineering	1
Saudi medical journal	Saudi medical journal	1
Springer	Soft computing	2
	Applied nanoscience	2
	Applied biochemistry and biotechnology	1
	Neural computing and applications	1
Springer - biomed central (BMC)	Israel journal of health policy research	1

Publisher	Journal	Count of retractions
Springer - nature publishing group	Optical and quantum electronics	1
	Naunyn-Schmiedeberg's archives of pharmacology	1
Taylor and Francis	Journal of psychosomatic obstetrics & gynecology	1
Taylor and Francis - dove press	Research and reports in urology	1
	Advances in medical education and practice	1
University of El Qued	Journal of fundamental and applied sciences	1
Wiley	Cochrane database of systematic reviews	1
	Acta paediatrica	1
Total		82

3.2. Characteristics of the Authors of the retracted papers

The total count of authors was 537, and 143 of them were affiliated with Jordanian institutes. This counts an author every time they appeared on a paper, so those with multiple papers were counted multiple times. 62 (75.6%) papers included international authors, 48 (58.5%) papers

were first authored by Jordanian institutes affiliated authors, and 1 paper was authored by double affiliated author. The country-distribution of the co-retracted papers with Jordan shows that Saudi Arabia had the highest number of co-retractions, (Figure.2) illustrates the world map with each country co-retraction count.

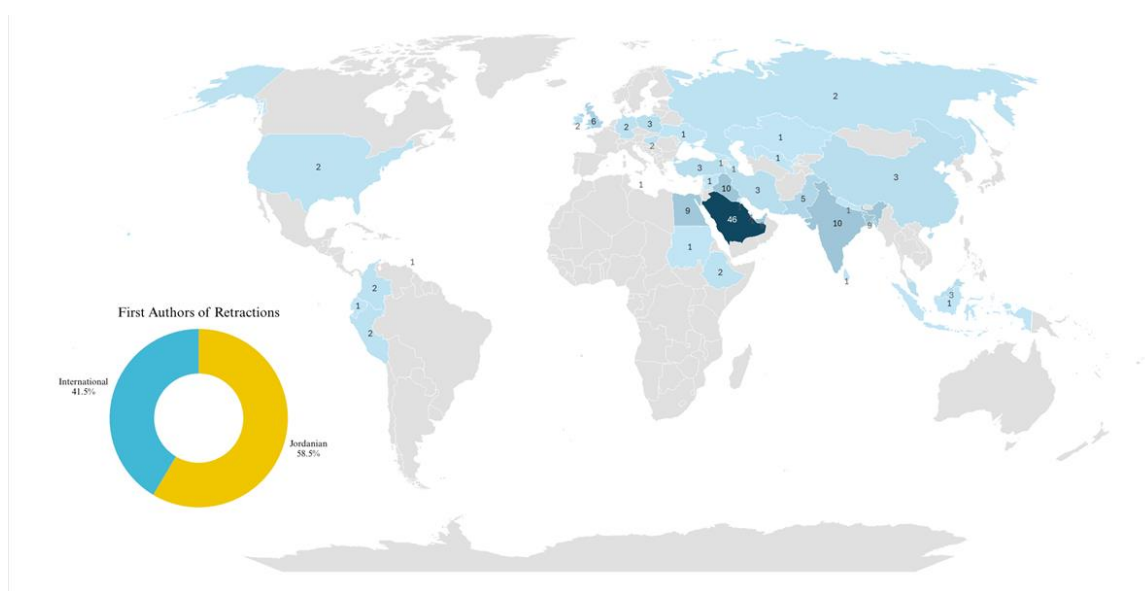


Figure 2, co-retractions with Jordan, and the distribution of the first-author affiliation: Jordanian or international.

The institutes distribution of retractions (Table. 3) showed that the institutes with the highest number retractions were: Jordan university of science and technology (22 retractions), Amman Arab university (12 retractions), Ajloun national university (10 retractions), and the university of Jordan (9 retractions). Interestingly, 10 and 9 retractions of Amman Arab university and Ajloun national university accordingly were co-authored by the same author. Also, the number of retractions that included

Jordanian authors who were undergraduate students without supervision by a professor from their university was 16, including 13 papers authored by Jordan university of science and technology students, and 5 papers from the university of Jordan. Moreover, 12 out of these 16 papers were case reports authored by international multi-country authors, and 11 out of these 12 case reports included 15 authors and labeled by “Paper mill/authorship-for-sale” as the reason of retraction.

Table.3 institutes of the retracted papers.

Institute	Count of retractions
Jordan university of science and technology	22
Amman Arab university	12
Ajloun national university	10
The university of Jordan	9
Al-balqa applied university	8
Al-hussein bin Talal university	7
Zarqa university	4
German-Jordanian university	3
Hashemite university	3
Middle east university	3
Royal medical services	3
Applied science private university	2
Isra university	2
Mutah university	2
Al-zaytoonah university	2
Al-ahliyya Amman university	1
The world Islamic sciences & education university	1
Jadara university	1
Jarash university	1
King Hussein cancer center	1
Prince hamza hospital	1
Petra university	1
Irbid national university	1
Princess Sumaya university for technology	1
Yarmok university	1

3.3. Reasons of the retraction

The distribution of retraction reasons is presented in Figure.1. The screening revealed that the two most frequent reasons for retraction were inadequate peer review (n=45, 54.9%) and concerns about content or data (n=43, 52.4%). Concerns about content or data encompass issues such as unreliable findings, data inaccuracies, or result manipulation. A considerable number of retractions (n=15, 18.3%) were explicitly attributed to paper mill activity or authorship-for-sale schemes. A final category of other reasons (n=8, 9.8%) captured reasons not fitting into the primary classifications. Four articles were classified as retraction because publisher error, first one was accidentally published in a different journal by the publisher, the second paper was mistakenly published before the author had the chance to proofread and approve the final version, the third paper was withdrawn because of duplicate publication by the same journal, and the fourth paper was published mistakenly by the publisher after the editor had rejected it.

Regarding the retractions reasons which we classified as “others”, one of the articles was retracted because that the identity, contribution, affiliations of a some authors and the origins of the study could not be verified, the second one was withdrawn as some of the author's contribution cannot be confirmed, the third one was a review article in which the authors were unable to update within required timeframe, the fourth article was withdrawn upon request of the authors without specifying the reason, the fifth one was retracted because the authors requested the retraction due unintended duplicate submission, and the last one was withdrawn conference abstract within three issues were retracted from the journal upon request by the conference organizers because the

journal was delisted from web of science.

DISCUSSION

In this paper, we attempted to thoroughly analyze every retracted paper that involved authors from Jordanian institutions and universities, to identify the primary and secondary reasons for each retraction.

The results showed that 81.7% of the retracted papers in Jordan were published within just four years (2021–2024) - compared to 52% globally -, with a striking increase between 2020 and 2021. This may be attributed to the emergence of several topics, such as covid-19, monkeypox, and artificial intelligence [3], which became trending among researchers. Additionally, research publication became a requirement for students to continue their graduate medical education, which increased the pressure on them to keep up with these trends, leading to a higher publication rate, as illustrated in Figure 3(B). However, as shown in Figure.3(A) the rise in publications was less steep than the surge in retracted papers, indicating that this increase may not be entirely natural.

In terms of the universities, it is noteworthy that a substantial share of the retracted papers came from universities considered small in size and research output. Moreover, the presence of 20 retracted papers involving the same researcher should raise red flags for closely monitoring the issue, as this indicates that a single researcher can impact the perceived research integrity of an entire institution.

Our results also revealed twelve retracted case reports, all of which had Jordanian undergraduate students as authors. The number of authors was larger than expected and from several countries for a report of only a few pages, whereas the normal

number of authors is typically 4 to 7, usually from the same institute or country [12]. To be fair, the journal shares part of the blame for not suspecting the involvement of a third party in the publication process. We also found that the majority of these reports were linked to certain regulations that began imposing pressure on students to publish a number of papers as a requirement for graduation or before post-graduate studies [13,14].

Saudi institutions had the largest number of co-retracted papers with Jordanian institutions. Another study also showed that Saudi Arabia has the highest Number of retractions per 10,000 inhabitants [15]. This highlights the importance not only of internal management and oversight, but also of collaboration between research ethics committees across multiple institutions and countries.

The results showed that all but one of the papers were published in open access, and the single remaining paper was retracted due to the absence of institutional approval for publication. This clear association calls for a serious examination of this publishing model in the context of research integrity.

Researchers often choose open access to increase the likelihood of citations [16], but this model has also given rise to problems such as predatory journals [17]. Moreover, shifting the publisher's main source of revenue to the authors themselves can create conflicts of interest: whereas publishers' profits once came from readers—so quality directly influenced demand—this incentive has largely disappeared in the open-access model [18].

Dr. Meho's attempt was one of the most prominent and recent efforts to develop an index that measures the risk to research integrity. In his analysis, he used the number of retracted papers, excluding those retracted

for non-author-related reasons [7]. Nevertheless, this approach faced some criticism. Iqhrammullah et al. argued that "the RI² index fundamentally misinterprets the meaning and implications of retractions", and warned that it could be used to stigmatize universities by publicly red flagging without conclusive evidence of a decline in their research integrity [19]. At the same time, Abdulwahid & Abed criticized the method of counting retractions as potentially error-prone and noted that the index overlooks other violations of research integrity, such as citation manipulation. Still, they also acknowledged its strengths, pointing out that it exposes certain practices that warrant questioning and makes them harder to ignore [20].

Although the number of retracted papers may highlight a flaw in an institution's research integrity, it is not comprehensive enough to state this with certainty. The detailed analysis in this paper is not intended to stigmatize universities and institutions, or authors, but rather to highlight the errors in order to address them within the institutions.

Despite implementing a double-verification process for the retracted articles, the final results may not fully reflect the true state of medical research integrity in Jordan. Variability among publishers in terms of retraction policies and the extent of post-publication oversight may have influenced the identification and classification of papers which should be retracted. In addition, the proliferation of predatory journals and the difficulty in accurately quantifying their publication volume represent another limitation. Such journals may constitute a non-negligible portion of the overall publishing output, often operating without rigorous editorial standards or post-publication verification mechanisms.

CONCLUSION

This study provided an in-depth analysis of retracted health research in Jordan to identify the main reasons behind retractions, aiming to develop plans to enhance research integrity. The notable increase in the number of retracted research papers in the years after 2020 was an observation worthy of investigating the underlying causes. Furthermore, correlations such as student research and open-access publishing call for provision of alternatives and preventive solutions from within universities. Therefore, we propose adopting the RI² index as an early warning signal rather than

a "stigma." We also suggest rewarding researchers and students based on quality rather than quantity, which would alleviate pressure on them.

Data-sharing statement

The data that supports the findings of this study are upon request from the corresponding author.

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Disclosures

The authors have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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فهم نزاهة البحث العلمي: تحليل للمقالات المسحوبة في مجال العلوم الصحية من المؤسسات الأردنية

عباده الليمون¹، حمزة أبو محمود¹، نور الدين البنا¹، ليث كريشان¹، وفيقة سليمان²

الملخص

الخلفية: إن التركيز المتزايد على البحث العلمي في المجال الصحي قد وضع الباحثين تحت ضغط متزايد لنشر عدد كبير من المقالات بهدف تحقيق مكاسب شخصية، مما دفع بعضهم إلى تبني ممارسات غير أخلاقية لمواكبة البيئة التنافسية الشديدة، وهو ما يُعرف بظاهرة "نشر أو اندثر". ونتيجة لذلك، سُجّل ارتفاع عالمي في عدد سحب الأبحاث المنشورة، وهو أحد المؤشرات المستخدمة في "مؤشر مخاطر نزاهة البحث العلمي²RI". ووفقاً لهذا المؤشر، صُنّفت معظم الجامعات الأردنية ضمن فئة "التحذير الأحمر". وتهدف دراستنا إلى تحليل المقالات المسحوبة ذات الانتماء الأردني في العلوم الصحية، لمساعدة المؤسسات الأردنية على تقييم ومنع الممارسات غير الأخلاقية وتعزيز سياسات النزاهة البحثية.

المنهجية: تم استخراج جميع المقالات المسحوبة في مجال العلوم الصحية التي تضمنت انتماء واحداً على الأقل لمؤسسة أردنية من قاعدة بيانات Retraction Watch. جرى فحص المقالات مرتين لجمع معلومات عن عدد المؤلفين الأردنيين وانتماءاتهم، إضافة إلى البيانات الواردة في القاعدة نفسها. كما تمت مراجعة ملاحظات السحب لتحديد وتصنيف أسباب السحب. وصُنّف المؤلفون لاحقاً بحسب حالتهم الأكاديمية. أُجريت التحليلات الوصفية وتحليل البيانات باستخدام برنامج Microsoft Power BI.

النتائج: بلغ العدد الإجمالي للمقالات المسحوبة 82 مقالاً، وكان أغلبها أبحاثاً أصلية (عددها = 62). تضمنت 62 مقالاً مؤلفين دوليين مشاركين، وكان 48 منها بأول مؤلف من باحثين منتسبين إلى مؤسسات أردنية. ومن بين 537 مؤلفاً كلياً، كان 143 منهم منتسبين إلى مؤسسات أردنية. لوحظ تكثُر زمني واضح لحالات السحب، إذ حدثت 81.7% منها (عددها = 67) خلال الأعوام 2021-2024. وعلى مستوى المجالات، شكّلت مجلة Cureus أعلى عدد من حالات السحب (عددها = 15)، وكان العديد منها تقارير حالات. أما عدد السحوبات حسب المؤسسة فكان كما يلي: جامعة العلوم والتكنولوجيا الأردنية (عددها = 22)، جامعة عمان العربية (عددها = 12)، جامعة عجلون الوطنية (عددها = 10)، والجامعة الأردنية (عددها = 9). كما تمّ تحديد 16 حالة سحب شملت طلاباً جامعيين دون إشراف موثّق من أعضاء هيئة تدريس في المؤسسة نفسها، وكان 12 منها تقارير حالات. أُرجعت أسباب السحب إلى ضعف عملية المراجعة العلمية (عددها = 45)، ومخاوف تتعلق بالمحتوى أو البيانات (عددها = 43)، تلتها ظاهرة "مصانع الأبحاث" أو "بيع التأليف" (عددها = 15)، ثم الانتحال العلمي (عددها = 6)، وأخطاء الناشر (عددها = 4)، ومشكلات في الموافقات (عددها = 2)، بالإضافة إلى فئة "أخرى" (عددها = 6).

الاستنتاجات: حلّت هذه الدراسة الأبحاث الصحية المسحوبة في الأردن بهدف تحديد الأسباب الرئيسية واقتراح آليات لتعزيز نزاهة البحث العلمي. وقد أظهرت النتائج زيادة ملحوظة في عدد السحوبات بعد عام 2020، وارتباطها بمشروعات الطلبة والنشر المفتوح الوصول. ويوصي الباحثون باستخدام مؤشر²RI كأداة إنذار مبكر (وليس كأداة وصم)، وتشجيع سياسات تكافئ الجودة على حساب الكم، بهدف تقليل الضغط الواقع على الباحثين والطلبة على حدّ سواء.

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