



Journals retract more than 300 scientific papers on covid

Description

More than 300 research papers have been withdrawn from scientific journals due to compromised ethical standards and concerns about the publications' scientific validity.

Retraction Watch has been tracking retractions and withdrawals of papers about covid-19 as part of its database and is maintaining a summary list which is updated as required. "For some context on these figures, see THIS post, our letter in *Accountability in Research* and the last section of THIS *Nature* news article," Retraction Watch said.

The list, which has been growing since April 2020, does not distinguish between withdrawal and retraction because journals that have made the distinction "have typically done it to justify not saying anything about why a paper was retracted, and to sometimes make a paper disappear without a trace." So far, the list contains 330 retracted papers and 19 expressions of concern.

According to senior researcher Gunnveig Grødeland at the Institute of Immunology at the University of Oslo, during the pandemic, researchers have compromised on ethical standards and tried to either get more publications approved or to take shortcuts around ethics.

While it is understandable for some articles to be updated or changed to be published in a different form, some have been retracted because the researchers did not obtain informed consent during the research.

Grødeland pointed out that other articles have been withdrawn after the editors noticed that the strategies the papers mentioned were giving the wrong impression in the media of being recommended as actual treatment or prevention of covid-19. She said these sorts of articles had to be withdrawn as they claimed things that neither the authors of the articles nor their institutions could vouch for.

Even prestigious journals such as *The Lancet* were publishing those articles. One of *The Lancet's* studies resulted in both the World Health Organisation and national governments halting comprehensive testing of hydroxychloroquine's effectiveness against covid. The extensive *Lancet*

study, allegedly based on research fraud, said that the drug increased the risk of heart arrhythmia and mortality for covid patients.

Most of the retracted papers, however, were published in smaller and less influential journals. For example, a 2021 study published in the *International Journal of Audiology*. In it, researchers from the University of said they had identified about 60 studies that reported audio-vestibular problems in people with confirmed covid. The study said that covid was associated with hearing loss, tinnitus or ringing in the ears, and vertigo. Now, these researchers are backtracking and admit that assumption was faulty.

Two years after their original study – and after the virus has been blamed for a range of health problems, including auditory disorders – the University of Manchester published a new study concluding that hearing loss is unlikely to be caused by covid.

One retracted paper published in Science examined the spread of the Omicron variant of covid in South Africa. It was withdrawn after social media users pointed out that some of the samples used could have been false positives.

Another paper was retracted by the editor of ScienceDirect “on the basis that there is clear evidence that the findings are unreliable.” The paper concluded that the vast majority of reported deaths due to covid are actually due to other comorbidities. However, ScienceDirect external reviewers found that the paper’s authors had misinterpreted data from the US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (“CDC”) to make its “erroneous conclusion.”

The volume of research on covid has outstripped that of other 21st-century viral disease outbreaks “by orders of magnitude”, according to a report earlier this month by the Institute for Scientific Information (“ISI”).

ISI’s analysis of about 190,000 scholarly publications from 2000-22 mapped the evolution of research across five pandemics. It found that in 2020, nearly 28,000 papers were published on covid, rising to nearly 68,000 in both 2021 and 2022. In comparison, H1N1 – one of the other pandemics considered in the analysis – caused the second-highest spike in research publications, peaking at about 1,300 papers in 2011.

Sources for this article include:

Featured image: [What a massive database of retracted papers reveals about science publishing’s ‘death penalty’](#), Science, 25 October 2018

by Rhoda Wilson

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