

## Egyptian Journal of Forensic Sciences

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### LETTER TO THE EDITOR

## Salami publication: A personal perspective

Dear Editor,

There is a predominantly expressed view by editors as well as the reviewers and the authors, and more importantly the readers about the unethical practice of salami publications. In an argument related to salami publications, the readers disagreed with an editorial team and supported the quality of a couple of articles, which were from the same set of patients, while the editorial team reaffirmed that it was a salami publication.<sup>1</sup> This instance is marked by a failure on the part of the original authors to disclose their related manuscript to the editors, thereby being unethical. While there are methods to classify unethical publication practices,<sup>2</sup> salami publication does not deserve the rating of 'highly unethical' or even 'moderately unethical', while the other unethical publication practices like fraudulent and plagiarized articles might.

In recent times, salami publications are being outrightly discouraged and condemned. However, this attitude needs further discussion, as salami publications are not equitable with other forms of unethical publication practices by authors. Honest researchers slicing their salami to publish more meaningful and easily understandable shorter articles are ethically better placed than the authors with plagiarized or fraudulent articles to their discredit.

We believe that there are several instances where two publications are considered as unethical salami publications by some, while they are not according to others. This can be presumed in the context of 'salami publication' finding itself in a gray area between ethical and unethical practice. The views expressed by others including the editors are justifying our stance; not all salami is unkosher<sup>3</sup>; it is not a violation of ethics to slice your salami.<sup>4</sup>

One of the arguments for terming such a practice unethical is the fact that the researchers, by way of salami publications, will inflate their curriculum vitae. We counter argue that, the researcher with extensive data deserves more credit, by split-

ting his vast data into more than one publication based on different aims and objectives, than a researcher with a smaller sized data and confined objectives. There are often justifiable reasons for producing more than one paper from the same database.<sup>5</sup> At times, slicing the data based on appropriate objectives into more than a single publication would enable the reader to understand better in a simpler fashion than the conglomerated data published as one single publication that runs into pages. For instance, if a researcher in the field of forensic anthropology collects data on various measurements of the forearm bones (ulna and radius), we believe that he is not wrong in slicing the data into many publications based on different objectives like sex determination from the forearm bones, stature estimation from the forearm bones and may be even determination of handedness from the metric analysis of the forearm bones. Though the data is from the same population, the objectives are different and specific in different papers, which will help the reader to comprehend better especially while browsing through the discussion section of the specific paper. Certainly salami is better served sliced than consumed whole.<sup>6</sup>

Another argument for terming such a practice unethical is the fact that the readers do not get the full picture. We counter argue that if there is a word count limitation in the targeted journals, a study containing extensive and important data will have to be split into multiple publications; reportage of important observations cannot be cut short to avoid unethical tag for the publications at credit; after all science will advance by complete reporting.

In any case, the discretion about splitting the data has to be tailored genuinely and reasonably by the researchers. However, to consider such a practice legitimate this has to be specified in the methodology section of the second article citing the reference of the first publication.<sup>7</sup> In addition, the authors should state in the cover letter to the editor at the time of submission of the second article that the second article includes subjects about which the authors have already published in a previous article.<sup>8</sup> If this is accepted by the peer reviewers and the editor of the journal, then such salami publications may be considered as not unethical.

If the data sent for publication is inadequate to suit the journal requirements, the editorial team has the right to reject the manuscript. The editorial team should not expect too much data into their article, just because it was from a study that has gathered more data; the yardsticks should be comparable with

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that of other articles. The fact remains that, the sliced data, if accepted by a peer reviewed journal, should deserve equal merit.

In conclusion, the need of the hour is to either get rid of the unethical tag from salami publications wherever apt, or to define an 'unethical salami publication' more appropriately and unanimously and thus to differentiate them from 'ethically acceptable salami publications'.

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