Reviewer’s report

Title: Attitudes and behaviours of medical students regarding academic misconduct: A cross-sectional study

Version: 1 Date: 22 May 2013

Reviewer: Ioannis Dimoliatis

Reviewer’s report:

As might be inferred from the tables, this report seems to injustice the study; underestimates the work they have done.

However, no absolute numbers are given in any of the tables; thus it is not possible to perform myself a statistical test.

The roundness of figures is quite unexpected. Also approximate answers, where exact absolute numbers should be given, e.g. "~100". Also unexpected inconsistencies eg, “There was a response rate of 52% (260/500) from the private medical college, with the lowest response rate observed from students of Year 3 and 5. In comparison, there was a 41% (205/500) response rate from students of Years 2 and 5 at a public medical college”. However, in the questionnaire section it is reported that the study included 260 participants from the private college and 205 from the public one, i.e. 465, not 500; and in the participants section it is reported exactly: “(260 students from all five years of the undergraduate medical program at the private medical college and ~100 students each from Year 2 and Year 5 from a public medical college” which means that the total number of participants is 460, not 500 nor 465.

And I do not understand why both the private and the public institutions are not exactly named.

In the background section it is reported that “A single study on occurrence of academic misconduct has been reported in the literature from Pakistan, related to students of business, commerce and engineering [11]. To the best of our knowledge, no study has reported on attitudes and behaviours related to academic misconduct in medical students in Pakistan.” However, a quick PubMed search reveals more relative articles: Shirazi B, Jafarey AM, Moazam F. Plagiarism and the medical fraternity: a study of knowledge and attitudes. J Pak Med Assoc. 2010 Apr; 60(4):269-73, aiming to assess knowledge and perceptions of plagiarism in medical students and faculty of private and public medical colleges in Karachi, and Gadit AA. Plagiarism: how serious is this problem in Pakistan? J Pak Med Assoc. 2006 Dec; 56(12):618. Why Pakistani papers, published in Pakistani journals, indexed in MedLine, are not mentioned? A better search might help in constructing the “background” and “discussion” sections.

Sampling: a table like this could help; Y = year of study, A attending students, Q
= questionnaires distributed, R = completed questionnaires in absolute numbers and as a % (response rate) for both schools:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution name (public)</th>
<th>Institution name (private)</th>
<th>Y</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>Q</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>Q</th>
<th>R</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>(%)</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>(%)</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>(%)</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>(%)</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>(%)</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>(%)</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>(%)</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Methods and Results should not be mixed. In the Background section, it is reported: “The results reveal significant differences found in the attitudes and behaviours towards academic misconduct between medical students of private and public sector institutions, between junior and senior students and in some cases, between males and females.” This sentence does not match to the background section because it refers to the results of the study, while the background section must include only those data which have previously been published and are relative to the study.

The presentation of results gives the impression that the purpose of the study was to compare a private with a public school, while the title of the paper states "Attitudes and behaviours..."

Results should be based on the tables but not repeating them.

After tables’ correction, the results and methods sections should be rewritten, the discussion and the abstract.

Hoping all this helps.

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

**Statistical review:** Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

'I declare that I have no competing interests'