

How to COPE with integrity in scientific publications?

The narrative unfolds

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BACKGROUND

- The Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) is a forum for editors of peer-reviewed journals, publishers, and all stakeholders involved with publication ethics to discuss issues related to the integrity of the scientific record.
- COPE serves as a platform for addressing and deliberating ethical concerns to safeguard integrity in scientific publications.
- It encourages all stakeholders to report and investigate ethical problems in the publication process by providing guidance and support in handling actual or suspected infringements of publication ethics.
- All anonymized cases submitted to the forum are entered into a case database¹; this may be a valuable research tool that can aid in handling similar cases in the future.

OBJECTIVE

- To evaluate the ethical misconduct cases submitted to COPE over a 5-year period to ascertain the trends of prevailing ethical concerns in scientific publications.

METHODS

- COPE cases database**
 - Cases reported from January 01, 2019 to December 31, 2023 were extracted

- Raw data extraction**
 - Raw data (case number, brief case summary, type of misconduct, core practices affected, COPE advice) were extracted into an Excel sheet

- Categorization of data**
 - Ethical misconducts were categorized into 12 categories

- Data analysis**
 - Subjective analysis

- Assessments**
 - Instances of ethical misconduct
 - Extent of impact on core COPE practices
 - COPE advice to address these issues

References

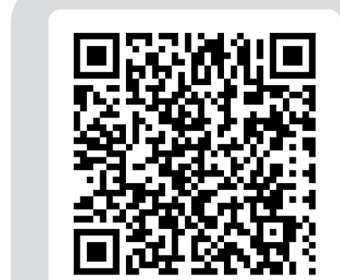
- Committee on Publication ethics website, 'Case', accessed 01 Jan 2024, <<https://publicationethics.org/guidance/Case>>
- Committee on Publication ethics website, 'Core practices', accessed 01 Jan 2024, <<https://publicationethics.org/guidance/Case>>

Disclosures

KT, VD, and MP are employees of SIRO Clinpharm Pvt. Ltd, India, and VS is an employee of SIRO Clinpharm USA LLC.

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Instances of ethical misconduct

In the 5-year period, total 131 ethical misconduct cases reported to COPE; most were associated with authorship, data integrity, legal matters, and plagiarism.

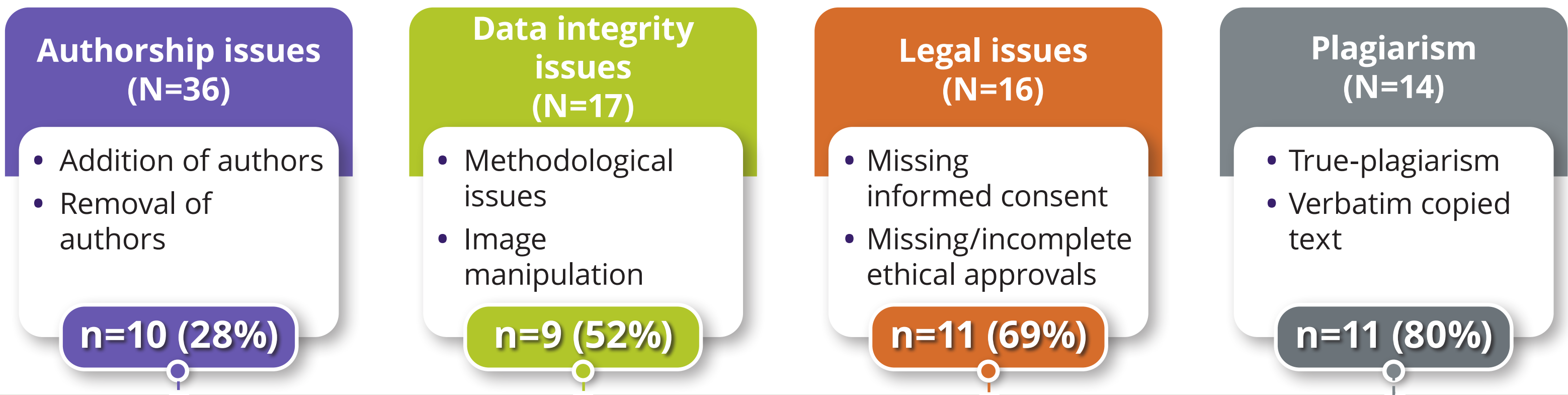
Table 1. Categories of ethical misconducts observed in COPE cases submitted in the last five years

Type of Misconduct*	No. of cases (N=131)	Cases (%)
Authorship issues	36	27
Data integrity	17	13
Legal issues pertaining to regulatory bodies	16	12
Plagiarism and copyright infringement	14	11
Duplicate/redundant publication	9	7
Conflicts of interest	9	7
Peer-review misconduct	8	6
Reviewer's interest	6	5
Post-publication issues	7	5
Submission related misconducts	5	4
Manipulation of citations	2	2
Behavioral misconduct	2	1

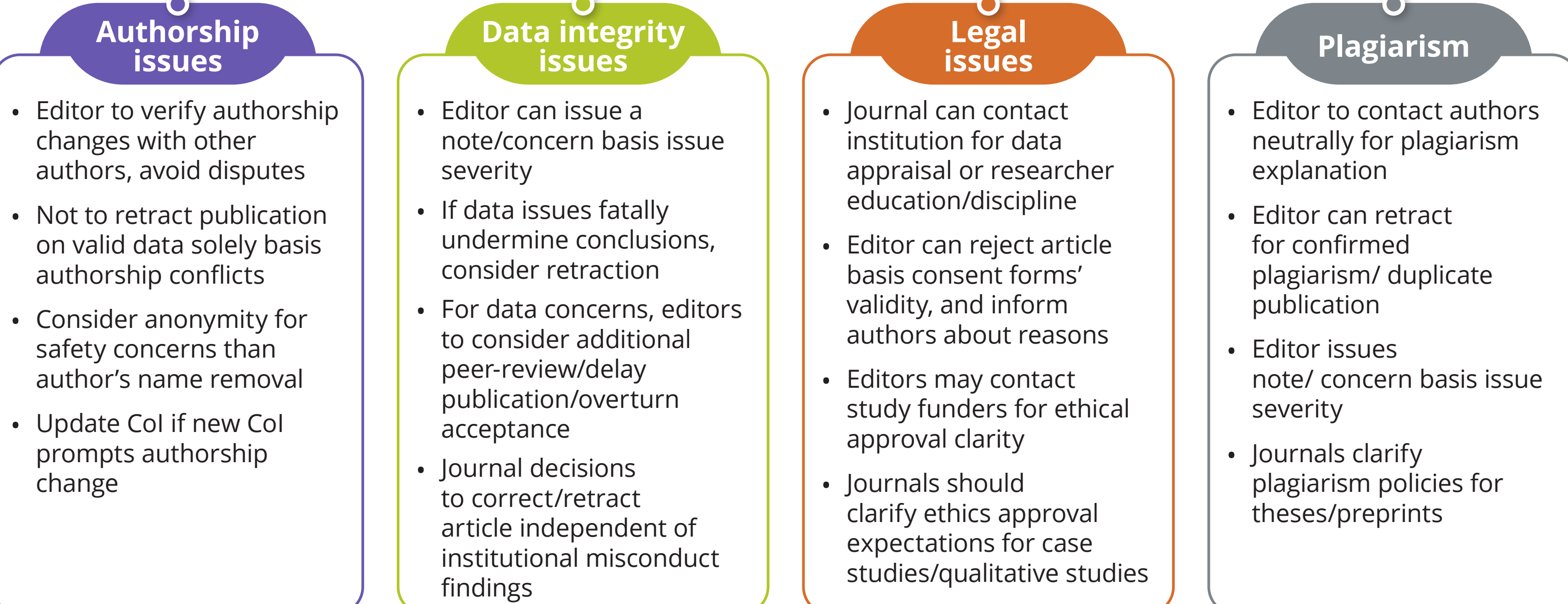
*Categories are selected based on: 1. Sengupta S, Honavar SG. Publication ethics. Indian J Ophthalmol 2017;65:429-32. doi: 10.4103/ijo.IJO_483_17; 2. Jain AK. Ethical issues in scientific publication. Indian J Orthop. 2010 Jul;44(3):235-7. doi: 10.4103/0019-5413.65133. COPE, Committee on Publication Ethics.

- Authorship cases:** Primary issues involved addition/removal of authors.
- Data integrity cases:** Largely concerned methodological/image manipulation.
- Legal issues:** Informed consent and ethical approvals issues were common.

Figure 1. Most frequent ethical issues within top four categories of misconduct



COPE advice on major issues



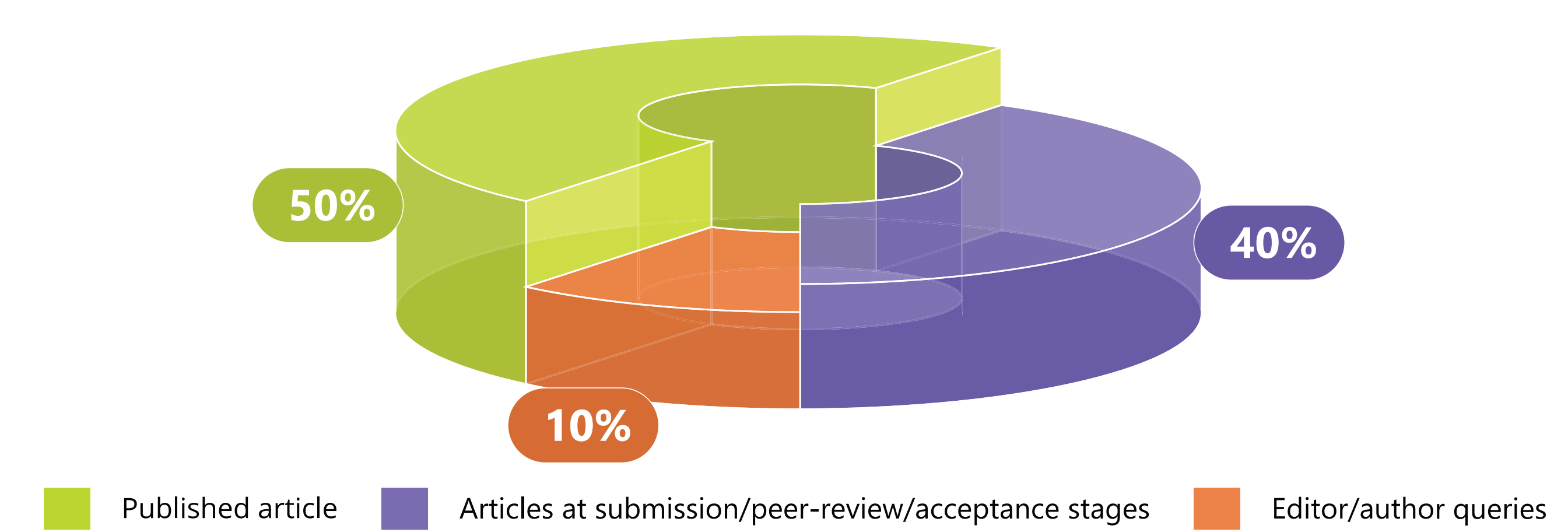
Pivotal role of editors/publishers in handling such cases

RESULTS

Publication stage & ethical misconduct

Out of the 131 incidences of ethical misconduct reported to COPE, 50% (66/131) were published articles, 40% (52/131) were articles at submission/peer-review/acceptance stages, and 10% (13/131) were related to queries from editor/author.

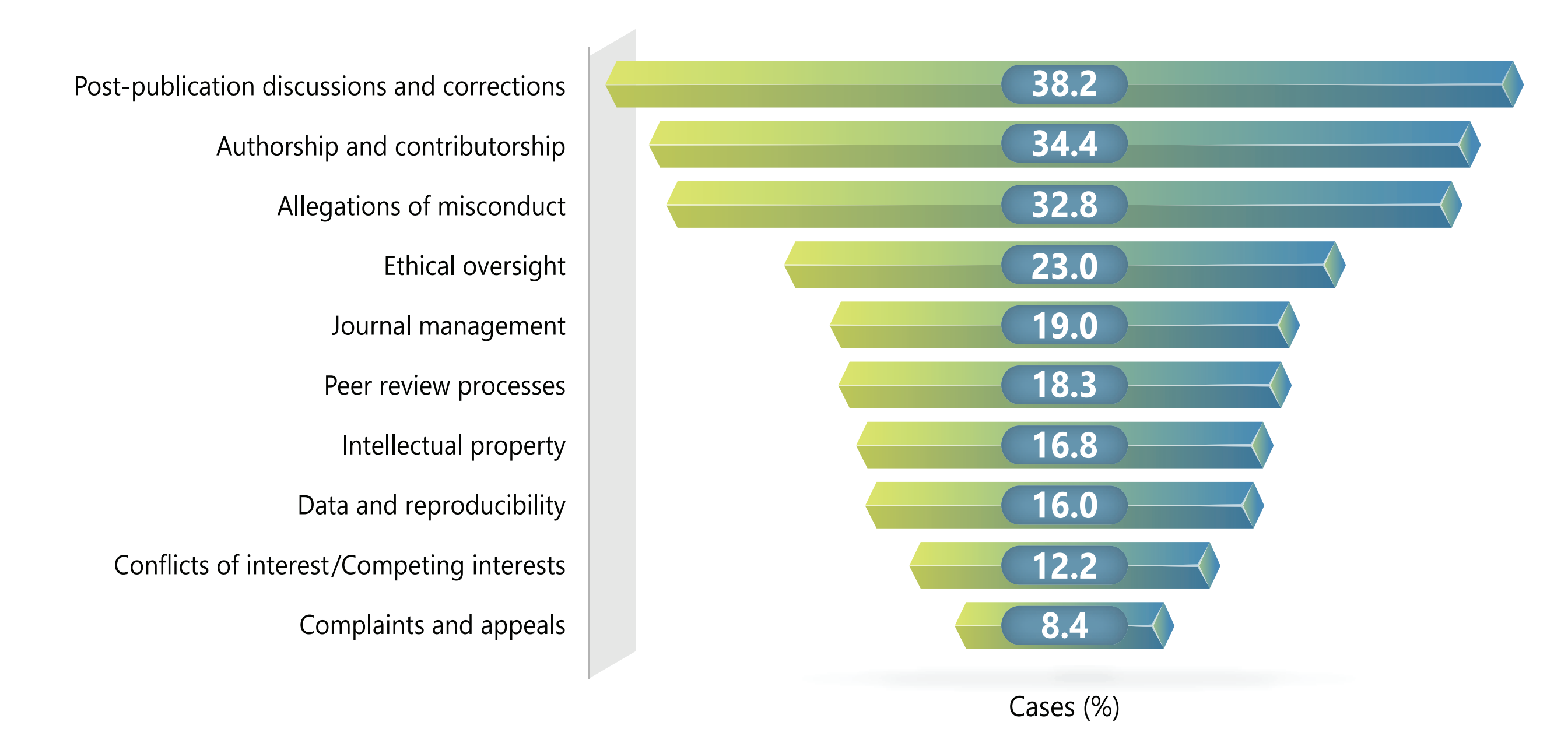
Figure 2. Publication stage at the time of reporting ethical misconduct



Impact on core COPE practices

The most impacted core COPE practices were post-publication discussions/corrections, and authorship and contributorship.

Figure 3. Core COPE practices affected in cases (%) reported to COPE in last 5 years



COPE, Committee on Publication Ethics.

In 76% cases, ≥2 core COPE practices² were implicated.

Table 2. Number of core COPE practices affected

No. of Core COPE Practices affected	No. of cases	Cases (%)
1	31	23.7
2	53	40.4
3	33	25.1
4	11	8.4
5	2	1.5
6	1	0.8

COPE, Committee on Publication Ethics.