

Policy on Conflict of Interest

Purpose: The integrity and credibility of scholarly publications depend on unbiased editorial processes. This policy aims to manage and disclose conflicts of interest within the editorial office to ensure fair and transparent decision-making.

Definition of Conflict of Interest: A conflict of interest arises when an individual's professional or personal affiliations, financial interests, or relationships could influence their judgment or decision-making in a way that could compromise the objectivity, integrity, or impartiality of their duties within the editorial process.

Disclosure Requirements:

1. **Editors:** Editors are required to disclose any financial, professional, or personal interests that could be perceived as a conflict of interest in relation to a submitted manuscript. This disclosure should be made upon appointment and updated regularly.
2. **Editorial Board Members:** Members of the editorial board are also required to disclose any potential conflicts of interest. These disclosures should be made upon appointment and updated annually.
3. **Reviewers:** Reviewers should disclose any conflicts of interest that could affect their impartial evaluation of a manuscript. They should refrain from reviewing any submission where a conflict exists.
4. **Publisher:** The publisher is required to disclose any conflict of interest, such as sponsor information and whether a related party is in a position that can affect the editorial process. This disclosure should be made transparently and updated as necessary.
5. **Authors:** Authors are required to disclose if the research conducted has funders/sponsors that can affect the research process. This disclosure should be included in the manuscript submission and updated as necessary during the review process.

Conflict of Interest Statement Issuance for authors:

1. **Disclosure Requirement:** Authors are required to disclose any potential conflicts of interest related to their research, including financial, professional, or personal affiliations that could influence the interpretation or presentation of their findings.
2. **Statement Issuance:** If a significant conflict of interest is identified but does not compromise the integrity or validity of the research findings, a conflict of interest statement will be issued alongside the published article. This statement will transparently disclose the nature of the conflict and its potential implications for the interpretation of the research.

Article Retraction post publication:

1. **Retraction Criteria:** Articles will be subject to retraction if the conflict of interest significantly undermines the integrity, credibility, or validity of the research findings. This includes cases where the research was sponsored or influenced by tobacco companies or other entities with vested interests that could compromise the objectivity or impartiality of the study.
2. **Retraction Process:** Retractions will be considered only after thorough investigation and consultation with relevant experts, stakeholders, and institutional bodies. If it is determined

that the conflict of interest has compromised the integrity of the research, the article will be retracted from the journal, with a clear statement explaining the reasons for retraction and any implications for the scientific community.

Handling Conflicts of Interest:

1. **Identification:** The editorial office will regularly review disclosures from editors, board members, and reviewers to identify potential conflicts of interest.
2. **Assessment:** Upon identification, the editorial office will assess the nature and severity of the conflict of interest. If necessary, the involved individual(s) may be recused from the editorial process related to the manuscript in question.
3. **Alternative Handling:** In cases where recusal is not feasible, alternative procedures, such as double-blind peer review or assigning responsibility to an independent associate editor, may be employed to mitigate the impact of the conflict of interest.
4. **Transparency:** Any conflicts of interest that cannot be fully mitigated will be transparently disclosed to relevant parties, including authors and readers, to ensure transparency and maintain trust in the editorial process.

Consequences of Non-Compliance for editorial board members and reviewers: Failure to disclose conflicts of interest or failure to adhere to the conflict of interest policy may result in consequences, including but not limited to removal from editorial roles or restriction from participating in the review process.

Policy Review: This policy will be periodically reviewed and updated to ensure its effectiveness and relevance.