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Alahí Dana Bianchini & Ignacio Mastroleo

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National Scientific Misconduct Policies in Argentina: Two Definitions of Research Misconduct

Alahí Dana Bianchini, B.A.^a and Ignacio Mastroleo, Ph.D.^b

^aFacultad de Filosofía y Letras, Universidad de Buenos Aires, Capital Federal, Buenos Aires, Argentina;

^bConsejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas, Buenos Aires, Argentina

ABSTRACT

In “An International Study of Research Misconduct Policies”, Resnik et al. count Argentina in the list of countries without national research misconduct policies. In this paper, we clarify that Argentina has national policies of research misconduct and present the research misconduct definitions of two official science organisms: the National Scientific and Technical Research Council (CONICET) and the Ethics Committee of the Argentine Ministry of Science (MINCyT).

KEYWORDS

Misconduct in research; research ethics; research misconduct policies; ethics and public policy; research integrity; research in developing countries

In “An International Study of Research Misconduct Policies,” Resnik et al. inquire about national policies on misconduct. As the authors initially argue, research misconduct is an international concern. Therefore, it is very important to know the policies that countries have in relation to misconduct. Is there a classification of what constitutes misconduct? What do they call misconduct specifically?

As the article states, “while institutional policies play a key role in preventing and policing misconduct, national policies are also important to ensure consistent promulgation and enforcement of ethical standards” (Resnik et al. 2015, 249). They select 40 countries, which are those that invested most in research and development, according to data from 2014 (Battelle 2013). Also, they define national scientific misconduct policy as “a law, regulation, or government funding agency policy operating at the national level that addresses research misconduct” (Resnik et al. 2015, 251). Then, they report that “Twenty-two of forty countries (55%) had a national misconduct policy. Four countries (18.2%) are in the process of developing a policy, and four (18.2%) have a national research ethics code but no misconduct policy” (Resnik et al. 2015, 252).

Within the list of selected countries, those corresponding to Latin America are Brazil, Mexico, and Argentina. Of these three, only Brazil is counted as a country that has a national policy of research misconduct. However, we claim that following Resnik et al.’s definition of national scientific misconduct

policy, Argentina should have been counted in the list of countries that have a national policy as well.

Indeed, in a resolution from 2006 which refers to the responsibilities of the investigator, the Board of National Council of Scientific and Technical Research (hereinafter, CONICET¹) ruled as follows:

It is inappropriate behavior {of researchers} (and in some cases, offense) to *fabricate* results, their *falsification* (or alteration) and *plagiarism*. (EC 2006, 3–4, personal translation, emphasis added)²

Moreover, the National Committee of Ethics in Science and Technology (CECTE), also under the MINCyT, developed a policy document, *Propositions for a Science and a Socially Responsible Technology*, in which they settle the requirements of researchers and scientific institutions. In the Introduction, the document presents the guiding principles that should govern socially responsible research, including open access to knowledge and information, respect for human rights, freedom of research, and the development of capacity for critical analysis and innovative creativity. To comply with these principles, researchers must comply with certain requirements. The one that interests us is the second one, which defines misconduct as follows:

Reject all forms of scientific fraud such as *fabrication*, that is, recording or reporting of data or forged results; *falsification*, that is, the manipulation of material, equipment or processes, the selective presentation, modification, change or omission of data, images or research results; and *plagiarism*, that is, the appropriation, without due credit, of another person's ideas, processes, results or expressions, including those that were accessed in the evaluation of a research project or unpublished work. (CECTE 2013, personal translation, emphasis added)³

These definitions by CONICET and CECTE are analogous to the definition of narrow scientific misconduct or fabrication, falsification, or plagiarism (FFP) misconduct in North American legislation.⁴

Adding Argentina to the list of countries with national scientific misconduct policies does not substantially modify the conclusions of Resnik et al. (2015). However, it is useful for future research of national scientific misconduct policies and to give studies of scientific integrity in Latin America greater visibility.

Notes

1. The National Council of Scientific and Technical Research (CONICET) was created by Decree Law No. 1291 of February 5, 1958, responding to the socially widespread perception of the need to structure an academic body that promotes scientific and technological research in the country. Instituted as an autarchic organism under the dependency of the Presidency of the Nation, it was then endowed with a wide range of

instruments that were considered adequate to raise the level of science and technology in Argentina at the middle of the century and that still constitute the axis of its actions: the Careers of the Scientific and Technological Researcher and the Personnel of Support to the Investigation, the granting of scholarships for doctoral and postdoctoral studies, the financing of projects and of executing units of investigation, and the establishment of bonds with international organisms governmental and non-governmental with similar characteristics (CONICET 2018).

2. “Es conducta inapropiada (y en algunos casos, delito) la fabricación de resultados, su falsificación (o alteración) y el plagio” (CE 2006, 3–4). La aclaración entre llaves es añadida por nosotros.
3. “Rechazar todas las formas de fraude científico tales como la fabricación, esto es el registro o informe de datos o resultados fraguados; la falsificación, a saber la manipulación de material, equipos o procesos, la presentación selectiva, modificación, cambio u omisión de datos, imágenes o resultados de investigación; y el plagio, es decir la apropiación, sin otorgar el crédito debido, de ideas, procesos, resultados o expresiones de otra persona, incluyendo aquellas a las que se tuvo acceso en la evaluación de un proyecto de investigación o de un trabajo inédito” (National Commission of Ethics in Science and Technology (CECTE) 2013).
4. The narrow definition of misconduct given by the NASEM report (2017) is “fabrication, falsification, or plagiarism in proposing, performing, or reviewing research, or in reporting research results. Fabrication is making up data or results and recording or reporting them. Falsification is manipulating research materials, equipment, or processes, or changing or omitting data or results such that the research is not accurately represented in the research record. Plagiarism is the appropriation of another person’s ideas, processes, results, or words without giving appropriate credit. Research misconduct does not include honest error or differences of opinion”.

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