

Letters to Editor

AUTHORSHIP: WHAT PUBLIC HEALTH SCHOLARS NEED TO KNOW

Joko Gunawan^{1,2*}

¹Belitung Raya Foundation

²Indonesian Student Association in Thailand (PERMITHA)

Accepted: 1 December 2015

***Correspondence:**

Joko Gunawan

E-mail: jokogunawan2015@gmail.com

Sir,

The debate among researchers in health science in the requirements of authorships still exists, especially in the area of public health, which often involve diverse disciplines in collaborative project. This condition however may impact to the weak collaboration and may not able to maintain good working relationship among individuals or institutions. There are two problems that have been highlighted, namely honorary authorship (known as “courtesy,” “gift,” or “guest” authorship; authors who have not met authorship criteria), and ghost authorship (an individual makes a substantial contribution to the research or the writing of the report, but is not named as an author).^{1,2}

There are some points actually need to be considered for the principles of authorship. First point is the participation in writing. Those involved in a project and having ability to write manuscript but choose not to participate or just give editorial comments have no claim in authorship, except they give intellectual contribution in design, conceptual review, methodology and any substantive

analyses.^{1,3} Another point is about financial support and seniority. There have been issues for those who provide financial support for research or in the term of seniority are able to claim authorship. In fact, those providing funding do not qualify for authorship as well as the faculty or thesis advisor, or holding a position of seniority in the setting.¹ There are many conditions that students or research assistants are not involved in the authorship, which is not appropriate to do. Otherwise students should normally be the first author on any multi-authored article based on their thesis or dissertation.⁴

On the other hand, it is argued whether individual giving technical contribution can be named as an author or not. It is right to do if the contribution is critical to the project, but not including data collecting, coding, tabulating, or analyzing data, providing materials, equipment, specimens, or resources, referring subjects, providing advice, conducting tests, and overseeing instrumentation.⁵ In this regard, the principle investigators should inform the

contributors about the requirement of authorships that an intellectual contribution is count rather than technical matter. It is because sometimes the meaning of collaboration leads to misconception.⁶ And the last point is about acknowledgment. Many individuals may provide valuable assistance to a project or to the writing and editing of a manuscript but it is not qualified to be authors. In this regard, the principle investigators should appreciate their contributions in other ways. For instance, to put their name in the acknowledgment or lists as member of research team, or cite their manuscripts if they have previous publications.⁶

It can be concluded that there are many points in the principles of authorship need to be considered. Therefore, to prevent misunderstanding, it is recommended that discussions about authorship should be held frequently. The agreement should be established between principle investigators, contributors, and collaborators in the early stage of the research and in the writing process for each manuscript in accordance with the principles, in which papers will be written jointly (and who will be first author each paper), and which will be single authored, with an agreed acknowledgement given to contributors). The author also remarks that the principle investigators need to see the national guidelines, which may provide different standards of authorship's principles.

Funding: No funding sources

Conflict of interest: None declared

REFERENCES

1. BSA. The Guidelines on Authorship for Academic Papers. 2001; http://www.britisoc.co.uk/media/31310/authorship_01.pdf?1451317953033. Accessed 12 November, 2015.
2. Gøtzsche PC, Hróbjartsson A, Johansen HK, Haahr MT, Altman DG, Chan A-W. Ghost Authorship in Industry-Initiated Randomised Trials. *PLoS Medicine*. 01/16 05/23/received11/13/accepted 2007;4(1):e19.
3. Albert T, Wager E. *How to handle authorship disputes: a guide for new researchers*2003.
4. Fine MA, Kurdek LA. Reflections on determining authorship credit and authorship order on faculty-student collaborations. *American Psychologist*. 1993;48(11):1141.
5. Sommerfeld E, Shaher R. Authorship guidelines for Vasisht Lab. <http://www.ling.uni-potsdam.de/~vasishth/docs/authorship-guidelines.pdf>. Accessed 10 November 2015.
6. BUSPHP. *Principles and Procedures for determining authorship*: The Boston University School of Public Health;1994.

Cite this article as: Gunawan J. Authorship: What public health scholars need to know. *Public Health of Indonesia* 2015;1(2):30-31.