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UNIVERSITE D'ABOMEY-CALAVI

CENTRE DE RECHERCHE POUR LA LUTTE CONTRE LES MALADIES INFECTIEUSES TROPICALES (CreMIT)/
TROPICAL INFECTIOUS DISEASES RESEARCH CENTER (TIDRC)

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SCIENTIFIC MISCONDUCT

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TIDRC/UAC RESEARCH GRANTS MANAGEMENT OFFICE

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Introduction

Good research practices are grounded in fundamental values of research integrity which support researchers in navigating the practical, ethical and intellectual challenges inherent in their work, requiring clarity, visibility and transparency.

TIDRC/UAC is committed to maintaining the highest standards of integrity across its research and teaching portfolio, and places integrity at the center of its decision-making process. As such TIDRC/UAC expects its research community to observe this relevant commitment.

To uphold the highest standards of integrity within the research community, the TIDRC/UAC has developed this policy on Scientific Misconduct. The aim of the policy is to define acceptable research behaviors and provide a clear framework for addressing any threats to, or violations of research integrity. The policy is intended to guide all staff conducting research at or on behalf of TIDRC/UAC. Below are the key values and principles that regulate research at TIDRC/UAC.

1. Definitions

1.1 Misconduct in Research

Misconduct in research is defined as, including but not limited to the intentional act and/or reckless negligence such as fabrication, falsification, plagiarism, or any other practice that seriously deviates from those standards that are commonly accepted within the scientific community for proposing, conducting or reporting on research. It does not include genuine errors or honest differences in the interpretation or judgment of data. This definition ensures that misconduct is clearly distinguished from honest scientific inquiry, which may involve unintentional mistakes or varying interpretations in evaluating research methods or results or misconduct unrelated to the research findings process.

1.2 Conflict of interest

Conflict of interest means real or apparent interference of a person's interest where potential bias may occur due to prior or existing personal or professional relationships. Practically, a conflict of interest refers especially to situations in which financial or other personal/business professional considerations may compromise, or may have the appearance of compromising an employee's professional judgement or decision-making ability in conducting their role/responsibilities or reporting research or in selecting a supplier or partner to work with.

1.2.1 Complainant

The complainant is the person making allegations of misconduct in research against one or more individuals (respondent{s}). Where potential misconduct is discovered, as opposed to alleged, TIDRC/UAC will act as the complainant.

1.2.2 Good faith allegation

It refers to an allegation of scientific misconduct made by a Complainant who honestly believes that scientific misconduct may have occurred. A good faith allegation needs not to be objectively made or subsequently verified to be made in good faith. However, a complainant who recklessly disregards evidence that disproves an allegation has not made the allegation in good faith.

Those who have made allegations in good faith will not be penalized and will be offered TIDRC/UAC's full support. However, TIDRC/UAC will protect individuals against frivolous, vexatious and/or malicious allegations of misconduct in research and will take appropriate action against any individual(s) responsible for such allegations.

1.2.3 Retaliation

This refers to any response by TIDRC/UAC or an employee that adversely affects the employment or other status of a complainant who, in good faith, has made an allegation of scientific misconduct or inadequate institutional response thereto, or who has cooperated in good faith with an investigation of such allegation.

1.2.4 Investigation

Investigation means the formal examination and evaluation of all relevant facts to determine if misconduct has occurred and, if so, the responsible person and the seriousness of the misconduct.

1.2.5 Named Person

The 'Named Person' within TIDRC/UAC responsible for oversight of the Research Integrity Process is a senior academic with considerable experience within the field of biomedical research. In most instances this will be one of the Deputy Director/Head of the research Unit but in cases where a real or perceived conflict exists, this will be delegated to an alternative senior academic staff accepted by the community.

The Named Person should:

- Be an individual within TIDRC/UAC with significant knowledge and experience of research, preferably at Professorial level.
- Have responsibility for:
 - receiving any allegations of misconduct in research;
 - initiating and supervising the Procedure for investigating allegations of misconduct in research;
 - maintaining the information record during the investigation and subsequently reporting on the investigation with internal contacts and external organizations;

And

- taking decisions at key stages of the Procedure.
 - Have a nominated alternate who will receive allegations of misconduct in research and initiate and supervise the Procedure for investigating them in the absence of the Named Person.

1.2.6 Respondent

The Respondent is the person(s) against whom allegations of research misconduct have been made.

1.2.7 Relevant Third Parties

The term ‘relevant third parties’ includes but is not limited to: professional bodies, research funders, University of Abomey-Calavi authorities, and the TIDRC/UAC management committee.

2.0 Procedures for preventing scientific misconduct

The scientific community of TIDRC/UAC is expected to make all possible efforts to prevent scientific misconduct through personal discipline and by setting a positive example. The primary responsibility for preventing scientific misconduct lies within the scientific community itself, including all researchers, staff, and faculty members involved in research activities.

2.1 Responsibilities to report research misconduct

All employees of TIDRC/UAC have responsibility to report any observed, suspected, or apparent misconduct in scientific research to the Named Person. If the reported circumstance does not meet the definition of scientific misconduct, the individual or the allegation will be referred to the appropriate official or office for resolution.

2.2 Preliminary assessment

Upon receiving an allegation of research misconduct, the Named Person shall promptly assess the allegation and determine whether there is prima facie evidence that justifies further investigation. In conducting this preliminary assessment, the Named Person will evaluate whether the allegation meets the definition of "research misconduct" as outlined in current policy. If sufficient evidence exists to support the claim, an inquiry will be initiated.

2.3 Cooperation with inquiry and investigation

All TIDRC/UAC employees are required to fully cooperate with the Named Person during the review of the allegation as well as throughout the inquiry and investigation process. This includes providing any relevant evidence related to the allegation.

2.4 Protection of Complainant

Any TIDRC/UAC employee may have confidential discussion about concerns of possible misconduct with the Named Person and will be advised of the appropriate procedure to report the allegation.

The Named Person shall ensure that:

- Confidentiality is guaranteed to protect complainants who report allegations of misconduct;
- The career prospects of “whistle blowers” are not jeopardized during or after investigations;
- Anonymity is maintained if so requested or if deemed appropriate to aid the investigation by way of non-disclosure of name, identity and other pertinent attributes that could adversely affect the ‘whistle blower’ or the outcome of the inquiry

- Investigations are expediently carried out and followed through to their logical conclusions.

2.5 Securing Data and Evidence

Once an allegation is determined to fall within the definition of scientific misconduct, all related research records and materials must be securely archived or stored as material evidence for the inquiry.

3.0 Guidelines for Conducting an Inquiry

The purpose of the inquiry is not to determine whether misconduct occurred but to evaluate the situation and assess whether there is sufficient evidence to suggest possible scientific misconduct that justifies further investigation.

3.1 Appointment of Inquiry Committee

If the Named Person in consultation with the TIDRC's Director decides that an inquiry should be conducted, the Named Person in collaboration with the Director of TIDRC/UAC will establish an ad hoc inquiry committee of three members. These individuals must have no conflict of interest in the case, must remain unbiased, and must possess the appropriate qualifications to evaluate the issue at hand. The role of this committee is strictly to assess the facts and determine whether there is sufficient evidence of scientific misconduct that justifies a formal investigation.

The respondent must be notified of the proposed committee members. If the respondent has any objection to the appointment of any member, he/she must submit the objections in writing. Should the objections be upheld, the Named Person will replace the challenged individual with a qualified substitute.

3.1.1 Inquiry Process

The inquiry process typically involves interviewing the complainant, the respondent, collaborators of respondent, key witnesses, and reviewing relevant original research records and materials. The goal of the inquiry is to objectively gather and assess the facts surrounding the allegation of misconduct.

3.1.2 Completing Inquiry Report

The inquiry committee is expected to complete the inquiry and submit a written report to the Named Person within 10 calendar days of its appointment.

If the committee requires additional time to complete the investigations, a written request with reasons for the extension must be submitted to the Named Person. This request will be recorded, and the respondent will be notified of the extension.

3.1.3 Content of Inquiry Report

The inquiry report must include:

- The evidence that was reviewed;
- Summary of interviews (including respondent and complainant comments);
- A clear conclusion regarding whether there is sufficient evidence for alleged scientific misconduct and whether to warrant a further investigation.

3.1.4 Comments by the Respondent and the Complainant

Both the respondent and complainant must be given the opportunity to provide written comments on the inquiry report. These comments will be included as part of the final record/report. The respondent should be provided with a redacted version of the report, ensuring that the identities, roles, and opinions of other individuals who participated in the inquiry are protected.

3.2 Decision of the Named Person

After receiving the complete report, the Named Person in consultation with the Director of TIDRC/UAC, shall determine whether to investigate, void or annul the matter or take other appropriate action.

4.0 Investigation

The purpose of the investigation is thoroughly examine and evaluate all relevant facts to determine whether scientific misconduct has occurred, identify the individuals involved, and assess the seriousness of the misconduct. Before the investigation begins the Head of RGMO will be provided with written notification of the name(s) of the person(s) against whom the allegation has been made.

4.1. Appointment of Investigation Committee

If misconduct is confirmed, the Director/Deputy-Director of TIDRC/UAC will notify the respondent that an investigation will be conducted. Also, the Director/Deputy-Director, in consultation with the Named Person, will appoint an investigation committee. Members of the committee should not have any apparent conflicts of interest with the respondent or the case in question, and they must have the necessary expertise to examine the evidence, interview the witnesses and conduct the investigation.

The scientific Named Person will notify the respondent of the proposed committee membership. If the respondent submits a written objection to any of the appointed members of the investigation committee, the TIDRC Director/Deputy-Director may decide to replace the challenged person with a qualified substitute.

4.2 The Investigation Process

If findings from the inquiry provide sufficient basis for the conduct of an investigation, the TIDRC Director/Deputy-Director in consultation with the Named Person shall appoint an investigation committee to initiate the process. This must be done within 30 days of the completion of the inquiry. The investigation will include a thorough review of all relevant research data and materials, including but not limited to research records, documentation, and any other evidence gathered during the inquiry.

At this stage, the interviewed parties are provided with comprehensive details of the allegations and the corresponding evidence. They are given the opportunity to respond to the allegations and present any relevant information or defence.

Interviews conducted as part of the investigation must be either transcribed or tape-recorded. A summary of these interviews should be prepared, shared with the interviewed parties for their comments or revisions, and included in the investigation file to ensure transparency and accuracy. The investigation should be completed within 120 days from the appointment of the investigation committee. This timeline will cover the process of conducting the investigation, preparing a report of the findings, and submitting the final report to the TIDRC Director through the Named Person for review and further action.

4.3 Content of Report

The final report must contain the procedures under which the investigation was conducted, a description of how and from whom relevant information was obtained, the findings, and explain the basis of the findings, and include an accurate summary of the views of any individual (s) involved in the misconduct, comments of both the respondent and the complainant as well as a description of sanctions taken by TIDRC/UAC.

4.4 Decision by the TIDRC/UAC

The Director or Deputy-Director will review the investigation report and make a decision on whether scientific misconduct has occurred. Based on the findings, the Director/Deputy-Director, in consultation with the Named Person, will determine the appropriate sanctions or administrative actions to be taken of TIDRC/UAC. These may include:

- restitution of funds to the supporting agency, if applicable;
- withdrawal or correction of all pending or published abstracts and papers that resulted from the research in question;
- removal from the project, special monitoring of future work;
- letter of reprimand, probation, suspension, salary reduction;
- initiation of steps leading to possible rank reduction, or termination of employment.

5.0 Plagiarism

Researchers/Authors who present the words, data, or ideas of others without attribution to the original source, are committing theft of intellectual property and may be guilty of plagiarism and thus of research misconduct. This applies to reviews, methodology and background/historical sections of research papers as well as to original research results or interpretations. If there is a word-for-word copying beyond a short phrase of six or seven words of someone else's text, that section should be enclosed in quotation marks or indented and referenced to the location in the manuscript of the copied material. The same rules apply to grant applications and proposals, clinical research protocols, and to students' papers submitted for academic progress. Citing substantive parts of one's own already published work without proper acknowledgment, also amounts to plagiarism (i.e., self-plagiarism).

Not only does plagiarism violate the standard code of conduct governing all researchers, but in many cases, it could constitute an infraction of the law by infringing copyright held by the original author or publisher.

An author should cite the work of others even if he or she had been a co-author or editor of the work to be cited or had been a supervisor or student of the author of such work.

The work of others should be cited or credited, whether published or unpublished and whether it was a written work, an oral presentation, or material on a website. Each journal or publisher may specify the form of appropriate citation. However, a researcher may not provide citations, in the case of well-established concepts that may be found in common textbooks or in the case of phrases which describe a commonly used methodology. Special rules have been developed for citing electronic information and should be noted.

Members of a research group who contribute to work that is later incorporated into a proposal or protocol are entitled to be consulted and informed as to what their role will be if the proposal is funded, or the protocol approved. A charge of plagiarism in the proposal or protocol on grounds that such members are not later included as part of the team that conducts the approved or funded research, however, can usually not be sustained. Such researchers who are excluded from subsequent research are entitled, however, to be considered for co-authorship in publications if their contributions merit it.

6.0 Other Considerations

6.1 Termination of Employment or Resignation Prior to Inquiry or Investigation

Termination of employment by the respondent, before or after an allegation has been reported, or during inquiry or investigation, will not preclude or terminate the misconduct procedures. If the respondent refuses to participate in the process after resignation, the scientific Committee Named Person will use its best effort to reach a conclusion concerning the allegation pointing out the effect of the lack of cooperation by the respondent on its review of all the evidence.

6.2 Restoration of Reputations

The TIDRC/UAC will undertake diligent efforts to restore the reputation of the respondent if exonerated of allegation of misconduct. The Named Person will ensure that all references to

the matter are removed from the respondent's personal file. All persons who have been interviewed or informed of the charge will be notified in writing that the charges have been dropped.

Respondents should be consulted regarding other actions that might be taken on their behalf to restore their reputation.

6.3 Retention of Records

After completion of a case and all ensuing related actions, the Named Person will prepare a complete file that includes the original record of inquiry and investigation, copies of all documents and other materials furnished to the appropriate committees. The Named Person shall retain the file for three (3) years from the date that Research Grant Management Office (RGMO) head completes its review of the case and all related actions. Access to the file shall be made available to the Head of RGMO or other authorized personnel upon request.

7.0 Administrative Actions

The TIDRC/UAC will take the appropriate administrative actions to protect public and donor funds and ensure that the objectives of government financial assistance are fully met. These actions may include implementing measures to safeguard the integrity of research funding, addressing any financial mismanagement, and ensuring that all research activities comply with the terms and conditions of funding agreements.

7.1 Reporting to the TIDRC Director/Deputy-Director

The Named Person must report in writing to the Director/Deputy-Director of TIDRC/UAC when:

- A decision is made to initiate an investigation. The notification should include the name of the person(s) against whom allegations have been made, the general nature of the allegation, and applications or grant number(s) involved, as well as a report of the outcome of the investigation,
- The TIDRC/UAC intends to terminate an inquiry or investigation for any reason. The notification should include a description of the reasons for the termination, and the Director/Deputy-Director should have the final say in whether further investigations should be undertaken or not.
- When the inquiry committee anticipates a delay in an investigation within 120 days as stated by the Named Person in handling such a case, a request for an extension must be made, which should include an explanation for the delay as well as an estimated new date for completion of the assignment.

If the request is granted, then the Named Person will send a periodical progress report to the Director.

When funding or application for funding is involved and there is an admission of scientific misconduct, the admission of misconduct will not be used as a basis for closing a case or not carrying out an investigation without the approval of the Named Person.

The Named Person shall notify the Director/Deputy-Director at any stage of the inquiry or investigation when:

- there is an immediate health hazard;
- there is an immediate need to protect government and donor funds or equipment;
- there is an immediate need to protect the interests of the respondent(s) as well as their co-investigators and associates or the complainants;
- it is possible the alleged incident is going to be reported publicly; and
- there is a reasonable indication of possible criminal violation.

7.2 Disciplinary Action

If an Ad Hoc Enquiry Committee reports that a majority of its members find that scientific misconduct has occurred, Director/Deputy-Director shall take appropriate disciplinary action.

8.0 Protection and Confidentiality

The rights and privileges of any employee accused of scientific misconduct will be protected by the existing provisions of the Institutional Regulations within TIDRC/UAC, which apply to any allegation of misconduct by an employee of this institution.

The confidentiality of this administrative process will be maintained at all times. In particular, the privacy of those persons who in good faith report apparent scientific misconduct will be observed. Nevertheless, written documentation of the inquiry and of the formal investigation will be maintained as permanent confidential records in the Office of the Director/Deputy-Director with secured reservation for a reasonable period.

Approval & adoption

This Scientific Misconduct Policy version 1.0 is hereby formally approved and adopted as the official policy of the Tropical Infectious Diseases Research Center/University of Abomey-Calavi, effective August 28, 2025.



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