INPLASY

Rapid Publication during Crises: Analyzing Retractions During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

Support - Northern Border University.

Review Stage at time of this submission - Completed but not published.

Conflicts of interest - None declared.

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Amendments - This protocol was registered with the International Platform of Registered Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis Protocols (INPLASY) on 29 May 2025 and was last updated on 29 May 2025.

INTRODUCTION

*R*eview question / Objective To systematically review and categorize the causes, processes, and impacts of retractions of COVID-19-related scientific articles during the first wave of the pandemic.

Condition being studied Retractions of scientific articles related to COVID-19 published during the first wave of the pandemic (December 2019–June 2020), with a focus on the causes, processes, and impacts of these retractions in the context of rapid publication during a global health crisis.

METHODS

Search strategy Keywords included: "Novel coronavirus 2019", "2019-nCoV", "COVID-19", "Wuhan coronavirus", "Wuhan pneumonia", "SARS-CoV-2" AND "retraction", "retracted", "withdrawn", "withdrawal", "temporary removal", "updated", "expression of concern". Last search: June 26, 2020."

Participant or population Retracted scientific articles related to COVID-19 published between December 2019 and June 2020. No human or animal participants are directly involved; the unit of analysis is the published article.

Intervention "Not applicable. This review does not assess a clinical, behavioral, or other intervention; it systematically analyzes retracted COVID-19-related scientific articles."

Comparator "Not applicable. This review does not compare interventions or groups; it systematically analyzes retracted COVID-19-related scientific articles without a comparator group."

Study designs to be included All types of published scientific articles (including original research, reviews, case reports, editorials, commentaries, conference abstracts, and preprints) that are related to COVID-19 and were retracted, withdrawn, or temporarily removed between December 2019 and June 2020. No

restrictions on study design, language, or publication status.

Eligibility criteria - Inclusion: All article types (editorials, commentaries, reviews, case reports, conference abstracts, preprints), any language, involving human or non-human studies, and computational analyses, if COVID-19-related and retracted/withdrawn between December 2019 and June 2020.
- Exclusion: Articles not related to COVID-19 or not retracted/withdrawn during the specified period.

Information sources Web of Science, PubMed, Scopus, Science Direct, Retraction Watch, MedRxiv, and BioRxiv.

Main outcome(s)
- Primary: Categorization of retraction causes (publisher error, author error, etc.).
- Secondary: Time to retraction, citation impact, policy influence.

Quality assessment / Risk of bias analysis Not applicable. This review does not assess the methodological quality or risk of bias of primary clinical studies. Instead, we ensured data quality and reliability by:
- Extracting all information from authoritative, publicly available sources (Retraction Watch, PubMed, journal websites).
- Having two independent reviewers screen and extract data for each retracted article.

Resolving discrepancies through discussion or with a third reviewer.
- Recording retraction reasons and article characteristics verbatim from official notices to minimize subjective interpretation.
No formal risk of bias or quality assessment tool was applied, as the unit of analysis is the retracted publication itself, not its underlying study design.

Strategy of data synthesis Descriptive statistics, tabulation of retraction causes, and summary tables for article characteristics and outcomes.

Subgroup analysis Data from included retracted articles will be synthesized using descriptive statistics and narrative summary. We will tabulate article characteristics (e.g., country, journal, type, peer-review status, time to retraction, citation metrics) and categorize the reasons for retraction based on information from official notices. Quantitative data (e.g., counts, percentages) will be summarized in comparative tables and figures. A narrative synthesis will describe trends, patterns, and notable cases, with particular attention to the

distribution of retraction causes, the timing and impact of retractions, and policy implications. No meta-analysis will be performed, as the unit of analysis is the retracted publication itself, not clinical outcomes.

Sensitivity analysis Where applicable, we will perform sensitivity analyses to assess the robustness of our findings. This may include:
- Reanalyzing data after excluding articles with ambiguous retraction reasons or unclear status (e.g., "expression of concern" vs. full retraction).
- Comparing results when classifying retraction causes using alternative categorization schemes (e.g., grouping "publisher error" and "authorship issues" separately or together).
- Assessing the impact of including/excluding preprints or non-peer-reviewed articles.
These analyses will help determine whether our main conclusions are sensitive to classification choices or inclusion criteria. No quantitative meta-analysis will be conducted, so the sensitivity analysis will be descriptive and qualitative in nature.

Country(ies) involved Saudi Arabia (Northern Border University).

Other relevant information All countries of author affiliation for retracted COVID-19-related articles published between December 2019 and June 2020 were included. In our sample, the most frequently represented countries were the United States.

Keywords Retraction; COVID-19; Rapid Publication; Scientific Integrity; Scholarly Article Removal; Systematic Review; Meta-Research.

Dissemination plans Results will be submitted to a peer-reviewed journal and presented at relevant scientific conferences. The protocol and results will be publicly available via INPLASY.

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