

Description

If you are a medical researcher investigating a drug's effect on the body, after gathering data you have a choice: should you publish all the data and conclusions in one paper? Probably so, because of the inter-relation of the data and its significant implications. However, there is a possibility that you may want to segregate the data and publish it in multiple papers depending on the type of data and its importance, e.g., one study could be published in a journal that publishes medicine-related research, whereas another study could be published in a journal that publishes research related to biochemistry. In this manner, an individual research program can yield several publications instead of having few published studies. For researchers, such segregation could help attract more citations and improve their resumes too. Although a fairly common practice, this "salami slicing" of research into many small studies is nevertheless considered to be ethically incorrect.

Salami Slicing

Dividing a manuscript into several small papers is considered a bad practice for several reasons. First, readers may not grasp the significance of the work if the results are widely scattered in multiple papers. In fact, the visibility of your research program could be diluted as many of your studies would have been published by journals having a lower impact factor. If you want the research to be visible to a wide audience, selection of journal and the content that would be published is definitely very important. Moreover, by creating multiple studies, many researchers would not be able to arrive at a study's significance, and thus would avoid citing the study in their literature reviews. Also, if the data is published in multiple studies with different conclusions, it makes it complicated for researchers to have complete visibility, which a single publication would have given. Thus, this practice of publishing data in staggered studies is believed to have ethical implications because it encourages fabrication of data and unnecessary extrapolations of results.

When is Salami Slicing Justified?

If a major research project is so extensive that it involves several research groups across disciplines, then it is justified that there are multiple publications to convey the overall impact of the research. For example, from a program that studies the impact of a drug, multiple studies could be published detailing with the synthesis of the drug, biochemical mechanisms, side effects of the drug on different animal models, effects of the clinical trials, and so on. Thus, dividing the data into multiple studies would help you convey the implications to the right audience. In fact, rather than implying that you

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are encouraging “salami slicing,” your research could indeed be published in high impact factor journals because of its impact!

Category

1. Manuscripts & Grants
2. Reporting Research

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