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Bibliometric Analysis of the Journal of Empirical Research on Human Research Ethics

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Abstract

The current study is a bibliometric analysis of the "Journal of Empirical Research on Human Research Ethics" for its 729 Scopus-indexed publications. The study is conducted with the objective of deriving valuable insights by analysing the journal through the application of bibliometric indicators like most prolific authors, institutions, and countries, their year-wise publication trends, types of documents published, and identification of their major focus areas through the application of the keyword co-occurrence method. The study identified articles (n=581) as the most preferred type of document, year 2010 as the most impactful year in terms of average citations per publication (n=32.36), author Sieber, J.E. from Georgetown University, Washington, D.C., United States as the most prolific contributor with 22 publications and University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa as the most prolific institution with 31 publications in the journal. Only 0.96% (n=7) of documents received more than 100 citations in the history of the journal's publications. Informed consent, ethics committee, education, data privacy and data sharing, bioethics, research integrity, and community-based participatory research are the major areas being worked upon in the journal. The study will provide insights to those seeking to publish their research in the journal, and provide insights into what the journal is publishing actively.

Keywords: Bibliometric analysis, human research ethics, empirical research, journal analysis, publication trends.

1. Introduction

Research publications are one of the most used and trusted ways to disseminate recent intellectual outputs developed through research in any field or domain. The Journal of Empirical Research on Human Research Ethics (JERHRE) is a double-blind peer reviewed journal that publishes empirical research and reviews of empirical literature on human research ethics with a periodicity of 5 times a year. The journal is published by Sage and has been indexed in the Scopus database since 2009 with a current CiteScore of 3.5. This is the only journal in human research ethics domain that is dedicated only to empirical research. The journal is ranked in various categories

like law (97/1025), communication (114/511), education (447/1543), and social psychology (129/310).

Bibliometric studies of a single journal are carried out to develop a portrait of that journal, which can indicate its quality, maturity, and productivity in any research domain or in any region and thus can help researchers in making informed decisions while selecting a journal to publish their research (Anyi et al., 2009). The bibliometric studies use mathematical and statistical analysis techniques to analyze the publication trends and to portray various aspects related to books and other media of information, such as the collaboration pattern among the authors of those publications, their citation patterns, prolific authors, and to get insight into the future trends based on this analysis (Pritchard, 1969; Nicholas & Ritchie, 1978). The present study is a bibliometric analysis of the Journal of Empirical Research on Human Research Ethics (JERHRE) to get valuable insights into the publication patterns of this journal in terms of year-wise publication distribution, citation patterns, document types, highly cited documents, most prolific authors, institutions, and countries.

2. Literature Review

Several bibliometric studies have been conducted on different journals to get insights into their publication and citation patterns based on various bibliometric indicators. Gaviria-Marin et al. (2018) in their study evaluated the publications of the Journal of Knowledge Management published between 1987 to 2016. They found that the USA and the UK were the leading contributors to this journal, whereas the contribution of the emerging economies was the least. Tsay and Shu (2011) in their study of the "Journal of Documentation (JOD)" during 1998-2008 by citation analysis found that the journal articles were the highly cited document type in this journal. This study also revealed that the cited journals were mainly classified into three main classes: library science, science, and social science. Siwach (2013) conducted a bibliometric analysis of IFLA Journal during 2008-12, and his findings revealed that the United States was the top contributor to this journal, followed by India. It was also found that self-citation was a common practice in this journal, with almost 48% authors citing their own work. Bibliometric study of the "Journal of Business Research" conducted on reaching 45 years of publishing in 2017, revealed that a total of 5344 documents were published since 1973. The most productive year for this journal was 2017, with 765 publications, but in terms of citations, 2015 was the most influential year. Michel Laroche and Jean-Charles Chebat were the top contributors to this journal in terms of number of publications (Donthu et al., 2019). Singh et al, 2023, in their study, analysed the literature published in the "Allelopathy Journal" during 1996 to 2022 and found that the maximum number of publications were contributed by F.Z. Wu, followed by Prof. S.S. Narwal and China emerged as the leading contributor for the journal with the maximum number of publications. Pandey et al. (2025) conducted a bibliometric study on the "evolution of epistemic trust in artificial intelligence", identifying key themes and research trends in this domain. This study utilised several software tools to clean and harmonise the extracted data. and was a combination of both, a systematic review and a bibliometric analysis, to provide insights into the key trends in the domain of the study.

Since we were unable to find any relevant bibliometric study related to this journal, the present study was conducted to analyse the publication patterns of this journal and to provide valuable

insight into publication trends through various bibliometric indicators such as citation patterns, year-wise publication distribution, and keyword co-occurrence.

3. Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of the study is to conduct a bibliometric analysis of "Journal of Empirical Research on Human Research Ethics". To achieve the same, the following research objectives were specified:

1. To identify year-wise publication distribution for the journal.
2. To identify the type of documents published in the journal.
3. To identify authors, affiliations, and countries that contribute most to this journal.
4. To enlist the highly cited publications of the journal.
5. To analyze the citation pattern of the journal's publications.
6. To explore and analyze the keyword co-occurrence map of the author keywords.

4. Methodology

The current study is a bibliometric analysis of the "Journal of Empirical Research on Human Research Ethics", performed to analyse the journal on the basis of various bibliometric indicators to trace the publication trends and their impact. The Scopus database was chosen for the present study, and the documents were retrieved using SOURCE-ID (17800156703), resulting in 742 documents on 23 April 2025. Since the journal issues of the year 2025 are still in process, the documents published in 2025 (n=8) and articles in press (n=5) were excluded as they may have incomplete metadata, have not had enough time to gather citations, and may distort the metrics and lead to unreliable comparisons. A total of 729 documents were chosen for the study, and the data was extracted in CSV format from the Scopus database, which was then analysed using MS Excel. Biblioshiny (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017) software, along with VOSviewer software developed by Leiden University's scholars (Van Eck & Waltman, 2009), was used for the data visualisation. OpenRefine (Delpeuch et al., 2025) was used for the purpose of cleaning and harmonising author keywords, which were later utilised to propose a thematic picture of the research trends in the journal. Authors and affiliation were not harmonised in view of the fact that only one source is used, which is believed to provide a uniform metadata structure. This might contribute to the methodological limitation of the study, too. The study is based on a single database (Scopus), as the analysis software used was compatible with handling a single database, and thus may have excluded some relevant literature.

5. Data Analysis

5.1. Brief summary and types of documents

The analysis highlights various bibliometric properties of documents published in the journal from 2009 to 2024. The journal accommodated 729 documents with 21172 references during these years. 2277 authors contributed to the journal through their publications, with 4.08 co-authors per document. An international co-authorship of 20.99% is observed by the journal. Table 1 bifurcates these 729 documents on the basis of types of documents, highlighting the clear dominance of

articles (n=581) in terms of number. Reviews (n=66) top in terms of number of citations with a total of 1249 citations. Notes (n=34), editorials (n=27), letters (n=11), and short surveys (n=6) are also published by the journal, but their citations are relatively low as compared to the top two types of documents.

Table - 1: Types of documents

S. N.	Document Type	Number of Documents	Total Citations	Average Citations Per Publication
1	Article	581	8703	14.98
2	Review	66	1249	18.92
3	Note	34	31	0.91
4	Editorial	27	64	2.37
5	Letter	11	6	0.55
6	Short Survey	6	8	1.33
7	Erratum	4	0	0.00
Total		**729**	**10061**	**13.80**

5.2. Year-wise publication and citation pattern

Table 2 tabulates the year-wise publication count ranging from 2009 to 2024 along with the citation pattern, and the same is visualised in Figure 1. A total of 729 documents published over the time period grabbed a total of 10061 citations. The journal published the highest number of documents in 2019 (n=69), followed by 2018 (n=58) and 2015 (n=53). The Year 2010, despite having only 36 documents published, stands out in terms of citational impact with an average citation per publication value of 32.36. The triennium ranging from 2010 to 2012 has remarkably high citational impact in the history of the journal, making these the most influential years. Decline in the number of citations in recent years may be attributed to the fact that recent publications take time to grab citations.

Table - 2: Year-wise publication and citation pattern

S. N.	Year	Total Publications	Total Citations	Average Citations Per Publication
1	2009	40	659	16.48
2	2010	36	1165	32.36
3	2011	46	1061	23.07
4	2012	43	969	22.53
5	2013	45	799	17.76
6	2014	50	960	19.20
7	2015	53	985	18.58
8	2016	46	667	14.50
9	2017	43	428	9.95

10	2018	58	712	12.28
11	2019	69	497	7.20
12	2020	46	534	11.61
13	2021	50	317	6.34
14	2022	49	232	4.73
15	2023	33	56	1.70
16	2024	22	20	0.91
Total		**729**	**10061**	**13.80**

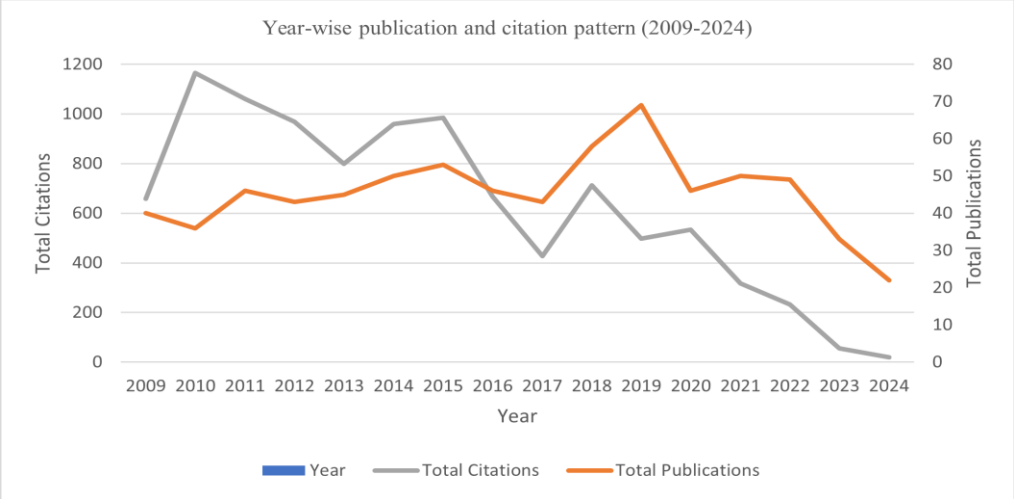

Figure 1: Year-wise publication and citation pattern

5.3. Most prolific authors

Table 3 represents the list of the top 10 most productive contributors to the journal in terms of number of publications, along with their affiliation, h-index (for the journal), and citation patterns. Out of the 115 publications of these authors, 92 are cited and garnered a total of 1856 citations, averaging 20.17 citations per cited publication. Sieber, J.E. from Georgetown University contributed the highest number of publications (n=22), although his citational impact is low with a citation rate of 3.36 citations per cited paper. Parker, M. from the University of Oxford and Bull, S. from the University of Auckland show a strong citational impact with an average citations per cited publication of 55.11 and 49.18, respectively. Wassenaar, D. and Fisher, C.B. also maintained a value of average citations per cited publication (27.67 and 28.33, respectively), highlighting the influence and quality of their work. Approximately 87% of the total citations were grabbed by these four authors alone: Bull, S.; Parker, M; Wassenar, D.; and Fisher, C.B., indicating their publications' quality and impact.

Table - 3: Most prolific authors

S. N.	Author Name	h index	Affiliation	Total Publications	Cited Publications	Total Citations	Average Citation Per Cited Paper
1	Sieber, J.E.	3	Georgetown University, Washington, D.C., United States	22	11	37	3.36364
2	Ethicist, P.	2	WIRB-Copernicus Group, Princeton, United States	16	10	17	1.7
3	Wassenaar, D.	10	University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa	13	12	332	27.6667
4	Bull, S.	10	The University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand	11	11	541	49.1818
5	Tsan, M.F.	5	McGuire Research Institute, Richmond, USA	10	10	60	6
6	Cooper, J.A.	3	WIRB-Copernicus Group, Princeton, United States	9	7	17	2.42857
7	Fisher, C.B.	7	Fordham University, New York, U. States	9	9	255	28.3333
8	Parker, M.	9	University of Oxford Medical Sciences Division, Oxford, United Kingdom	9	9	496	55.1111
9	McNair, L.	3	WIRB-Copernicus Group, Princeton, United States	8	6	16	2.66667
10	Pratt, B.	4	Australian Catholic University, Sydney, Australia	8	7	85	12.1429
Total				**115**	**92**	**1856**	**20.174**

5.4. Most prolific institutions

Table 4 represents the top 10 most contributing affiliations along with their country, citation patterns and h index. The average citation per cited publication for these affiliations is 20.704 which are for a total of 189 cited publications. University of KwaZulu-Natal from South Africa is at the top of the list with 31 publications, of which 29 are cited, accumulating 615 citations and an h-index of 14. It is noted that institutions from the United States clearly dominate the journal, as 6 out of 10 affiliations are US-based. The journal being housed in the United States attracted a larger number of authors as well as affiliations based in the US as contributors. University of Oxford from United Kingdom records the highest citations per cited publication (n=36.47), despite having only 17 publications, demonstrating high impact relative to number of publications contributed. Similar pattern is observed for United States based University of Washington that managed to grab 31.7 citations per cited publication, highlighting a strong scholarly influence.

Table - 4: Most prolific institutions

S. N.	Affiliation	Country	Total Publications	Total Cited Publications	Total Citations	Citations Per Cited Publication	h index
1	University of KwaZulu-Natal	South Africa	31	29	615	21.2069	14
2	The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill	United States	24	23	444	19.3043	13
3	Johns Hopkins University	United States	21	19	297	15.6316	12
4	University of Toronto	Canada	20	20	335	16.75	10
5	National Institutes of Health NIH	United States	18	17	261	15.3529	10
6	University of Washington	United States	17	17	539	31.7059	10
7	University of Melbourne	Australia	17	17	372	21.8824	9
8	University of Oxford	United Kingdom	17	17	620	36.4706	12
9	Case Western Reserve University	United States	16	15	269	17.9333	8
10	University of California, San Diego	United States	16	15	161	10.7333	8
Total			**197**	**189**	**3913**	**20.704**	

5.5. Top contributing countries

Table 5 represents the top 10 countries in terms of the number of publications, along with their citation patterns and h-index. A total of 703 documents have these countries among their contributors, of which 660 documents have at least one citation each. As also highlighted in Table 4, Table 5 also justifies the dominance of the United States with a total of 406 publications and 6532 citations contributing to an h index of 38 (highest among all countries). Kenya and Belgium, with relatively less number of publications (17 and 14, respectively), show exceptionally high average citations per cited publication (24.43 and 24.29, respectively), making them the countries with the most impactful publications.

Table - 5: Top contributing countries

S. N.	Country	Total Publications (TP)	Total Citations	Cited Publications	Average Citations Per Cited Publication	h-index
1	United States	406	6532	381	17.14	38
2	Canada	62	1141	59	19.34	18
3	South Africa	56	761	51	14.92	15
4	United Kingdom	55	1239	54	22.94	20
5	Australia	48	625	46	13.59	13
6	Kenya	17	342	14	24.43	8
7	Germany	16	105	14	7.50	4
8	Netherlands	15	246	13	18.92	7
9	Belgium	14	340	14	24.29	8
10	Sweden	14	183	14	13.07	9
Total		**703**	**11514**	**660**	**17.45**	

5.6. Top-cited publications

Figure 2 represents the highly cited publications among the total 729 publications. The most cited article, authored by Abbott L. & Grady C. (2011), titled "A systematic review of the empirical literature evaluating IRBs: What we know and what we still need to learn," received 214 citations. It is noted that two of these top 10 publications are primarily authored by Ross, L.F., identifying him as one of the most influential contributors that Table 3 failed to showcase. These publications mainly discussed various ethical, practical, and methodological challenges related to research.

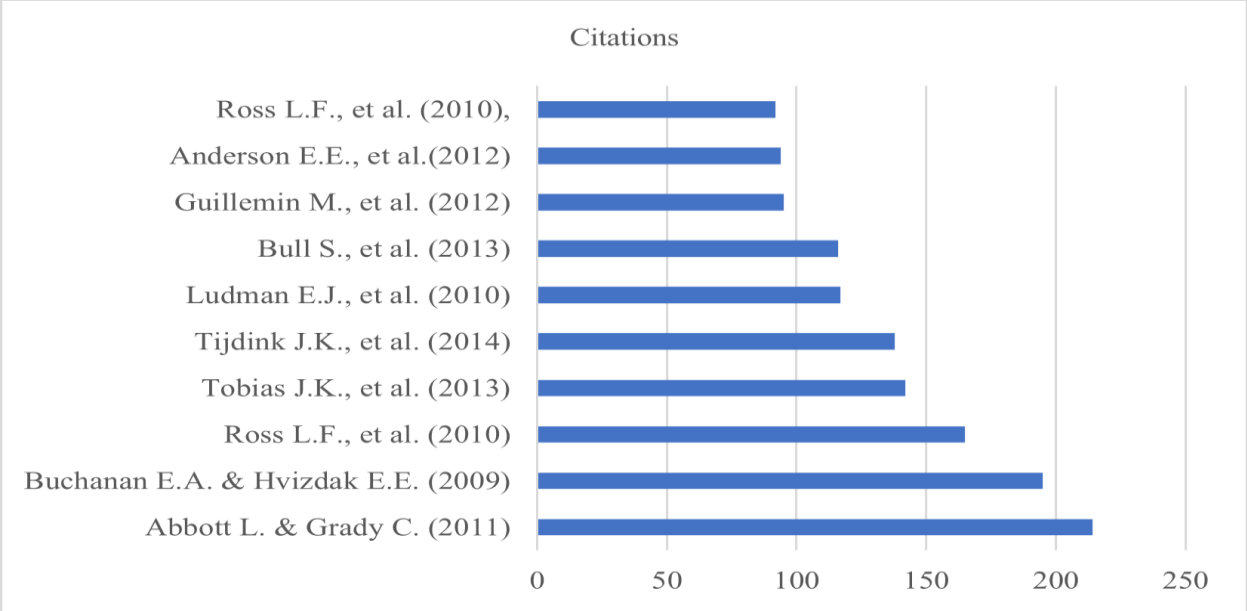

Figure 2: Top cited publications

5.7. Citation profile

Table 6 shows the citation profile of 729 documents published in the journal that grabbed a total of 10061 citations. 12.07 % (n=88) documents received nil citations, and only 0.96% (n=7) publications received more than 100 citations. Most of the publications belong to the category of 1 to 10 citations (56.71%), indicating the dominance of publications with a relatively lower number of citations, which might be attributed to the accessibility of the published research as well as the publication type. Categories of citations between 11 to 20 and 21 to 50 have nearly a similar number of publications (129 and 125, respectively), making a total of 34.85% documents for these two categories.

Table - 6: Citation profile

No. of Citations	Total Publications (TP)	TP %	Total Citations	Total Citations %
Zero	88	12.07	0	0.00
1	66	9.05	66	0.66
2	55	7.54	110	1.09
3	41	5.62	123	1.22
4	36	4.94	144	1.43
5	27	3.70	135	1.34
6	37	5.08	222	2.21
7	23	3.16	161	1.60
8	25	3.43	200	1.99
9	24	3.29	216	2.15

10	24	3.29	240	2.39
11 to 20	129	17.70	1894	18.83
21 to 50	125	17.15	3950	39.26
51 to 100	22	3.02	1513	15.04
>100	7	0.96	1087	10.80
Total	**729**	**100.00**	**10061**	**100.00**

5.8. Keyword co-occurrence

Figure 3 represents the assessment of the authors' keywords for 729 documents published in the journal. A total of 1722 keywords were analysed following a full counting method of clustering using the VOSviewer software. 111 keywords met the threshold of a minimum co-occurrence value of 5 which were grouped in six different clusters. Research ethics is the most used keyword (181 times), making it a multidisciplinary field (with link strength of 372) closely related to informed consent (119 times), institutional oversight, and community participation. There are six main clusters, red, blue, green, yellow, purple, and orange, in the map focusing on topics like informed consent, ethics committee, education, data privacy and data sharing, bioethics, research integrity, and community-based participatory research, respectively.

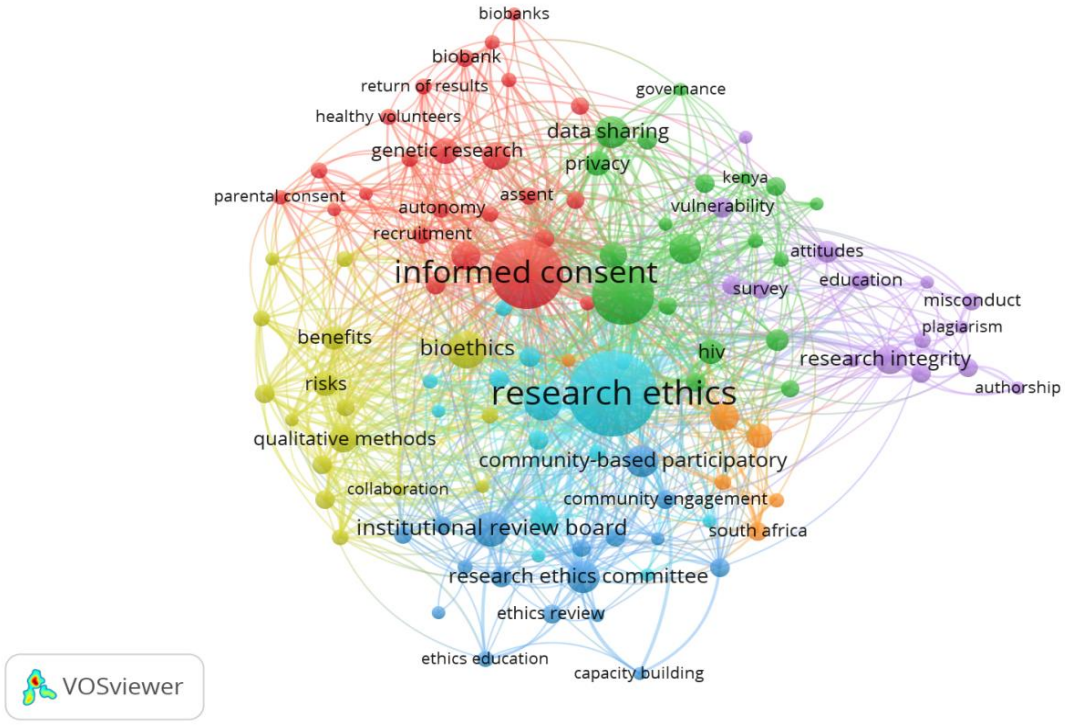

Figure 3: Keyword co-occurrence

6. Discussion

This study is the analysis of 729 publications of the Journal of Empirical Research on Human Research Ethics, which gathered a total of 10061 citations, yielding an average of 13.80 citations per publication. The study revealed a dominance of research articles in the document type, with nearly an 80% share, and reviews emerged as the most cited document type among all. Although the number of articles showed a positive growth, the journal has observed a decline in citation average in recent years, which may be attributed to the recency of the research or the shift in the research focus of the journal. The peak for the same was observed in 2010, where the journal observed 32.36 citations per publication. This decline might be attributed to the relatively recent publication of many papers, which typically take time to accumulate citations. The study identified authors like J.E. Sieber, M. Parker, and S. Bull with a higher number of contributions that are well supported by strong citation patterns. Ross, L.F., is also identified as one of the most influential contributors, having primary authorship in two of the ten highly cited publications of the journal. Also, the findings from the study revealed that the majority of the publications were from the authors and institutions affiliated with the United States, both in terms of the number of publications as well as citations. These results align with a previous study in the same subject area, for the journal entitled "Accountability in Research", conducted by Rani & Siwach (2025), showing similar outcomes. Majority of the highly influential institutions are from countries like United States, South Africa and United Kingdom. The maximum share of publications from US-based authors and affiliation might be attributed to the fact that the journal itself is housed in the United States and this in turn made US the most prolific contributor to the journal. The keyword co-occurrence map identified six major clusters of research, with the topics of informed consent, bioethics, and community-based participatory research being highlighted as critical areas of scholarly inquiry.

7. Conclusion

This bibliometric analysis of the Journal of Empirical Research on Human Research Ethics provides valuable insights into the publication and citation trends of the journal from 2009 to 2024. Findings indicate a steady increase in the number of publications, although average citations have decreased recently. The United States has been the leading contributor to both publications and citations, with a significant number of influential authors and institutions. The keyword co-occurrence revealed a strong emphasis on collaborative efforts and ethical concerns, particularly in areas like research integrity, informed consent, and bioethics. These trends suggest that the journal remains a crucial platform for advancing discourse on responsible research conduct and ethical practices in the global research community. This study will serve as a valuable resource for researchers, policymakers, and academics interested in the ongoing developments and challenges in the field of research ethics.

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