

Publication

Is failure to raise concerns about misconduct a breach of integrity? Researchers' reflections on reporting misconduct

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This article describes and discusses the views of researchers on the significance of raising concerns about scientific misconduct in their work environment and the reasons or circumstances that might deter them from doing so. In this exploratory qualitative research study, we conducted in-depth interviews with 33 researchers working in life sciences and medicine. They represent three seniority levels and five universities across Switzerland. A large majority of respondents in this research study argued that failure to raise concerns about scientific misconduct compromises research integrity. This is an encouraging result demonstrating that researchers try to adhere to high ethical standards. However, further interaction with respondents highlighted that this correct ethical assessment does not lead researchers to take the consequent action of raising concerns. The factors that discourage researchers from raising concerns need to be addressed at the level of research groups, institutions, and by setting a positive precedent which helps them to believe in the system's ability to investigate concerns raised in a timely and professional manner. Training of researchers in research integrity related issues will have limited utility unless it is coupled with the creation of research culture where raising concerns is a standard practice of scientific and research activities.

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