Universiteiten
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Casus Wetenschappelijke Integriteit

2026

Ontbreken van verklaringen over ethische toetsing en geïnformeerde toestemming in een publicatie - Ongegrond

Wageningen University & Research

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1 Onderwerp

Ontbreken van verplichte verklaringen over ethische toetsing en geïnformeerde toestemming in een publicatie.

2 Advies Commissie Wetenschappelijke Integriteit Wageningen University & Research aan het college van bestuur

On [date] [year], the Scientific Integrity Committee of Wageningen University & Research (hereafter: CWI) received an anonymous complaint against [Name 1], [Name 2] and [Name 3] (hereafter: the Accused). The complaint expressed concerns regarding ethics and integrity compliance regarding the publication […] (hereafter: Publication). The Complainant stated that mandatory ethics and consent statements are missing, while formal ethical approval from an independent research ethics committee and documented informed consent are required by both WUR and the publisher ([Name publisher], hereafter: Publisher). The Complainant also referred to […] that pointed out that the publication did not provide any indication of […] ethics approval.

Assessment of admissibility
Complaints regarding suspected infringement of scientific integrity are dealt with in accordance with the WUR Scientific Integrity Complaints Procedure (hereafter: Complaints Procedure). With regard to anonymous complains, the Complaints Procedure states in paragraph 2.4:
An anonymous Complaint may only be dealt with provided that the Executive Board sees grounds for this because it is of the opinion that:
a. compelling public interests or the interests of the Institution or party involved render it necessary to do so; and
b. the Committee [i.e. CWI] *holds the view that the facts can be investigated without the contribution of a Complainant.*

The CWI discussed the complaint on [date] [year]. The CWI was of the opinion that the facts can be investigated without the Complainant's involvement and decided to advise the Executive Board of Wageningen University to deal with the complaint, as it considers the possible lack of ethical review and informed consent to be of sufficient weight to warrant the investigation. The Executive Board adopted this advice and requested the CWI to deal with the complaint.

On [date] [year], the CWI sent the complaint to the Accused, informed them about the Complaints Procedure and the confidential counsellors for scientific integrity and asked for a written statement of defence. The CWI received the statement of defence on [date] [year].
The CWI also informed the Managing Directors of the Science Groups of the Accused in confidence about the complaint. The content of the complaint was not shared.

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View of the Complainant
The study described in the Publication reports surveys of […]. According to the Complainant, the publication does not contain an ethics approval statement. Moreover, it does not mention any review by the Research Ethics Committee of Wageningen University & Research (hereafter: REC) or any other ethics body, nor does it provide an exemption or justification of Publisher's editorial policies, which explicitly require such a statement. The publication's acknowledgements noted funding ([Name, Name]) and […]. However, […] does not substitute for formal ethical approval from an independent research ethics committee, which is required by both WUR and Publisher. Moreover, the publication does not document informed consent. The paper only says participation was "voluntary and completely anonymous", but does not describe how consent was obtained, what information was given to participants, whether consent was written or verbal, or that participants could withdraw. According to the Complainant, this violates WUR's ethical guidelines and the requirements of Publisher.

View of the Accused
After receipt of the complaint, the Accused informed the first author of the publication, [Name 4], who is currently affiliated with [Name institution]. The publication was part of […] project carried out by [Name 4]. The Accused were […] at that time. The statement of defence was written on behalf of all authors.

The field research that was described in the publication was conducted between [Month] and [Month] [year]. According to the authors, there was at that time no formal mandatory requirement applicable to, or clearly communicated for, obtaining prior ethical approval from the WUR […] Ethics Committee for this category of anonymous and non-interventional survey research conducted […]. Moreover, ethical-clearance statement, exemption statement, or structured (consent) declaration was never addressed or asked for by the journal or the publisher during the publication process.

The survey was carried out with permission from the relevant […]. These permissions are not presented as substitutes for independent ethical review, but they demonstrate that […] had been authorized by […]. Participation in the survey was voluntary.

No separate formal research protocol or standalone written informed-consent form was prepared at the time. However, the introductory section of the questionnaire contained the procedure that interviewers were required to follow before beginning each interview. Before an interview, interviewees were informed about the topic and purpose of the survey, the types of information that would be requested, the use of the information exclusively for academic purposes, the confidential treatment of their identity and responses, the reporting of findings only in aggregated form, and the expected duration of the interview. The introductory statement ended with the question "May I begin now?". The interview was intended to proceed only after the prospective respondent had verbally agreed to participate. The consent procedure was thus embedded in the questionnaire.

The authors included evidence (questionnaire, research permits and project proposal and approval by […] to substantiate their rebuttal.

View of Research Ethics Committee
The CWI contacted the Executive Secretary of the REC. He confirmed that the current requirements were not applicable at the time the research was conducted.

Conclusions and advice CWI
The CWI concludes that the complaint is unfounded as the Accused pointed out that the current requirements did not apply at the time of the research, which was confirmed by the Executive Secretary of

the REC. Besides, if the journal or publisher had required additional information regarding ethics approval or informed consent procedures, this should have been addressed during the publication process. This was not the case.

The CWI advises the Executive Board of Wageningen University:

- to declare the complaint unfounded;
- […]

3 Aanvankelijk oordeel van het college van bestuur

Het college van bestuur van Wageningen University heeft in zijn aanvankelijk oordeel besloten om de klacht ongegrond te verklaren conform het advies van de Commissie Wetenschappelijke Integriteit.

4 LOWI

Er is geen advies gevraagd aan het LOWI.

5 Definitief oordeel van het college van bestuur

Op 26 oktober 2026 heeft het college van bestuur van Wageningen University in zijn definitieve oordeel de klacht ongegrond verklaard.