

# **OPEN ACCESS IN ETHICS RESEARCH: AN ANALYSIS OF OPEN ACCESS AVAILABILITY AND AUTHOR SELF-ARCHIVING BEHAVIOUR IN LIGHT OF JOURNAL COPYRIGHT RESTRICTIONS**

Mikael Laakso, Andrea Polonioli

The debate around open access is an important and complex one. Academic research outputs have traditionally been subjected to subscription-access and a paywall, but over the past three decades the situation has started to change. Recent estimates suggest that more than half of recently published journal articles are now freely available online (Piwowar et al. [2018](#)).

The complexity of the debate around open access also stems from the presence of clashing stakeholder interests, where the vision for the path forward is not uniform and key actors have their own considerations and arguments for how the future of scholarly publishing should be shaped.

A general assumption is that academics want to have their work read, and universities are paying them to write it and to provide the bulk of the expertise-requiring work for journals. And yet universities have traditionally paid again to get access to that work, and potential readers who are outside the universities are denied access to it. It should come as no surprise that this looks to many an unsustainable and unfair process. At the same time, whilst many academics have seen open access publishing to be a viable solution to the unfairness and unsustainability of the current situation (Bacevic and Muellerleile [2017](#)), others have warned that the case for open access has also opened the door to research and publication practices of lower standard (Beall 2012).

The goal of this study is to comprehensively examine the actual open access availability of journal articles compared to journal copyright policies and restrictions by considering a specific research community, namely ethics research. In this study, we want to assess the current status of open access within the community of ethicists and their academic production in terms of articles in scholarly journals.

We first aim at clarifying the extent, and the ways, through which ethicists share their scholarly material online, focusing specifically on the following set of questions:

To what degree are ethicists' journal publications freely available online?

How common is it for journal publications to be open access through journal websites within the field of ethics?

Which websites and platforms do ethicists use when self-archiving?

What versions of the journal publications do ethicists use when self-archiving?

Are popular ethics journals clear with regard to their self-archiving policies?

As the second aim, we will carefully examine the two important aspects of (1) copyright infringement and (2) undersharing. More in detail, our study seeks to provide data to answer the following questions:

Comparing policies to web observations, are ethicists prone to copyright infringement?

Do ethicists undershare their research outputs?

What is the current role of institutional repositories in facilitating authors' self-archiving?

What is the current role of ASNs for sharing research publications among ethicists?

The study discovered a high proportion of articles available open access, 56%, which is among the higher open access percentages observed in any study for any discipline. That this figure stems from ethics researchers is even more surprising since previous studies have measured very low open access shares for articles published by journals within the humanities and philosophy. Open access to 27% of total articles, i.e. close to half of the 56% total open access observed, was provided through a single copy available on the web.

However, we could also observe that ASNs often also have a complementary role in being parallel avenue researchers chose to make their works available through. Academia.edu, ResearchGate and PhilPapers were all observed to have a strong presence among the dissemination channels used among ethicists, while institutional repositories were found to have low use. We found that ethicists are at the same time prone to copyright infringement and undersharing their scholarly work, i.e. articles are made available on the open web incompatible with publisher policies (mainly publisher's PDFs distributed on ASNs) while these and a much larger proportion of articles could be self-archived in compliance with the policies but are not.

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