

have exhausted their quota of students for guidance, resort to what can be called 'proxy' or 'ghost' guidance. This is done by various ingenious ways. Some plant a junior faculty member or another colleague, who does not have enough number of candidates to become the main (proxy) guide and the senior faculty member, who does not have any available slots, becomes the joint guide or co-guide. The proxy guide may or may not be interested in the area or have enough expertise and experience in the topic of the research—this should be an important consideration, almost a necessity. Another motive of having a proxy guide is to have continual research in the field of the work, through the work of the scholar. Sometimes, it is a matter of prestige to have many PhD students under you. There are some possible advantages, for instance, if the topic of research is too complicated, or difficult, a junior faculty guide may actually seek the help of a senior faculty, as a co-guide.

From an ethical viewpoint, proxy guidance may be used to conceal a potential conflict of interest in the research. Expectedly, most attention is paid to the main guide, even if it is a proxy guide, rather than the senior guide, who hides in the list of joint guides or co-guides. The proxy guide is pressurized to accept the role due to her/his being junior to the guide who has no slots. There may also be a promise of academic incentives to the junior person—promotions, travel to meetings and conferences or other perks. It also provides the proxy guide a scholar, without much effort, and not much to do but to look after the administrative part of the thesis, whereas the scientific and research aspects are managed by the joint/co-guides.

No doubt this facilitates the work of the scholar and helps in continuation of the research work; this is neither ethical nor appropriate. Despite being facilitatory, it amounts to using unfair means to achieve a result. It also means suppression of information about the genuine supervisor—not the main (proxy) guide, but one of the joint guides. The implication of this to the student can be grave. A student who sees his mentor and guide using unfair means learns a wrong lesson. The student might use similar and other unfair methods in data collection, analysis, paper writing and submission of the dissertation.

In clinical or medical settings, this raises another concern, as clinical work and postgraduate teaching will be adversely affected, if one has to provide supervision to more than 8 PhD scholars, besides the MD students. The limit of a reasonable but finite number of students is done to maintain the quality and standards of the research and supervision.

In the world of research and publishing, we are aware of ghost authorships but there is no discussion about such 'ghost' or 'proxy' guides. Professionals and teachers need to be aware of this phenomenon and its long-term implications. Cheating in any form should be unacceptable and must not be indulged in. Such ethical breaches should be treated as research misconduct by institutions and research bodies. Institutions, their research bodies and ethics committees, should educate mentors to refrain from 'proxy' guidance.

*Conflicts of interest.* None declared

Santosh K. Chaturvedi  
Department of Psychiatry  
National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences  
Bengaluru  
Karnataka  
India  
*skchatur@gmail.com*

### On proxy guidance and ghost supervisors of dissertations

The University Grants Commission (UGC) in its recent notification on minimum standards and procedures for MPhil and PhD regulations has laid down guidelines for allocation of research supervisors.<sup>1</sup> Since this puts a limit on the number of students one can guide at a time, mentors are resorting to a form of proxy guidance. A professor at any given point of time can guide a maximum of 3 MPhil and 8 PhD scholars. One would consider this a good number of students to impart quality guidance and one should not be guiding more scholars. I would like to mention that the UGC rules are not applicable to institutes of national importance such as the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Post-graduate Institute of Medical Education and Research, Jawaharlal Institute of Postgraduate Medical Education and Research, and National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences. UGC rules apply to all other medical deemed universities and medical institutes offering PhD courses. The medical institutes of national importance, mentioned above, have their own PhD rules and regulations, which are similar to the UGC rules.

Nonetheless, it has been observed that supervisors, when they

### REFERENCE

- 1 University Grants Commission (Minimum Standards and Procedure for Award of M.PHIL./PH.D Degrees) Regulations, 2016. The Gazette of India: Extraordinary, Ministry of Human Resource Development, July 2016.