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# Yet another problem for scholarly communication in criminology: The case of a Spanish journal turned into a paper mill

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The *Electronic Journal of Criminal Science and Criminology* (in Spanish, *Revista Electrónica de Ciencia Penal y Criminología*, RECPC) was founded in March 1999 by Jesús Barquín at the University of Granada. Over time, it became one of the most influential journals on criminal law and criminology in Spain and across the Spanish-speaking world. Articles published in the journal have been cited more than 14,000 times, reaching an h-index of 57<sup>1</sup>; that is, at least 57 articles have each been cited a minimum of 57 times. RECPC also appeared in the influential 2023 ranking of criminal-law journals produced by the Conference of Deans of Law Faculties in Spain (Conferencia de Decanos y Decanos de las Facultades de Derecho de España, 2023), where it was one of only three Spanish journals to appear in the first quartile (Q1) of that ranking. It was also rated the highest by experts in the discipline, ranking number one among all journals in the Criminal Law area<sup>2</sup>. As of today, according to the Scimago Journal Rank (SJR) 2024, RECPC is placed in the third quartile of all law journals worldwide, with an h-index of 5 (coverage 2019-2024)<sup>3</sup>; in other words, among the top 75% of law journals globally. RECPC has therefore enjoyed, or once enjoyed, both national and international prestige, having published high-impact articles. Both authors of this note have previously published in this journal, and one served on its Scientific Board until May 2024.

As of 2 October 2025, information on the journal's former website<sup>4</sup> indicated that in June 2024 RECPC changed editorial management and its content was migrated to a new website<sup>5</sup> (Figure 1). No further details were provided about the reasons for or the process behind this change, although the context suggested that the journal may have been purchased by a new group. The name of the new group managing the journal was not specified on the website; the only clear statement was that, from May 2024, the RECPC Scientific Committee ceased to have any connection with the content published in the journal.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://scholar.google.es/citations?user=OGF0DnsAAAAJ>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.facultades-derecho.es/registro-conferencia-decanos-2022/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.scimagojr.com/journalsearch.php?q=21101056812&tip=sid&clean=0>

<sup>4</sup> <http://criminet.ugr.es/recpc/>

<sup>5</sup> [www.revistacriminologia.com](http://www.revistacriminologia.com)

# Revista Electrónica de Ciencia Penal y Criminología

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En mayo/junio de 2024, la Revista Electrónica de Ciencia Penal y Criminología cambió de gestión editorial y de URL ([www.revistacriminologia.com](http://www.revistacriminologia.com)). En su ubicación original ([criminet.ugr.es/recpc](http://criminet.ugr.es/recpc)), quedará permanentemente disponible lo publicado desde su creación en marzo de 1999 hasta mayo de 2024. En el nuevo dominio podrá accederse en exclusividad a los contenidos incorporados a partir de dicha fecha, además de al contenido histórico de la revista.

Todos los miembros del Comité Editorial (incluidos el director y el editor) y del Comité Científico de RECPC dejaron de tener cualquier vinculación o responsabilidad en la revista a partir de junio de 2024.

La información contenida en esta página y en otras albergadas en la ubicación original de RECPC es válida a fecha de 20 de mayo de 2024.

Desde el 1 de junio de 2024, la Revista Electrónica de Ciencia Penal y Criminología ha pasado por completo a <https://revistacriminologia.com>

Cualquier nuevo envío/publicación en esta revista solo estará disponible en la nueva web oficial.

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From June 01, 2024, the Electronic Journal of Criminal Science and Criminology has been fully shifted to <https://revistacriminologia.com>

We request all authors, readers and subscribers to note the change in the official journal website.

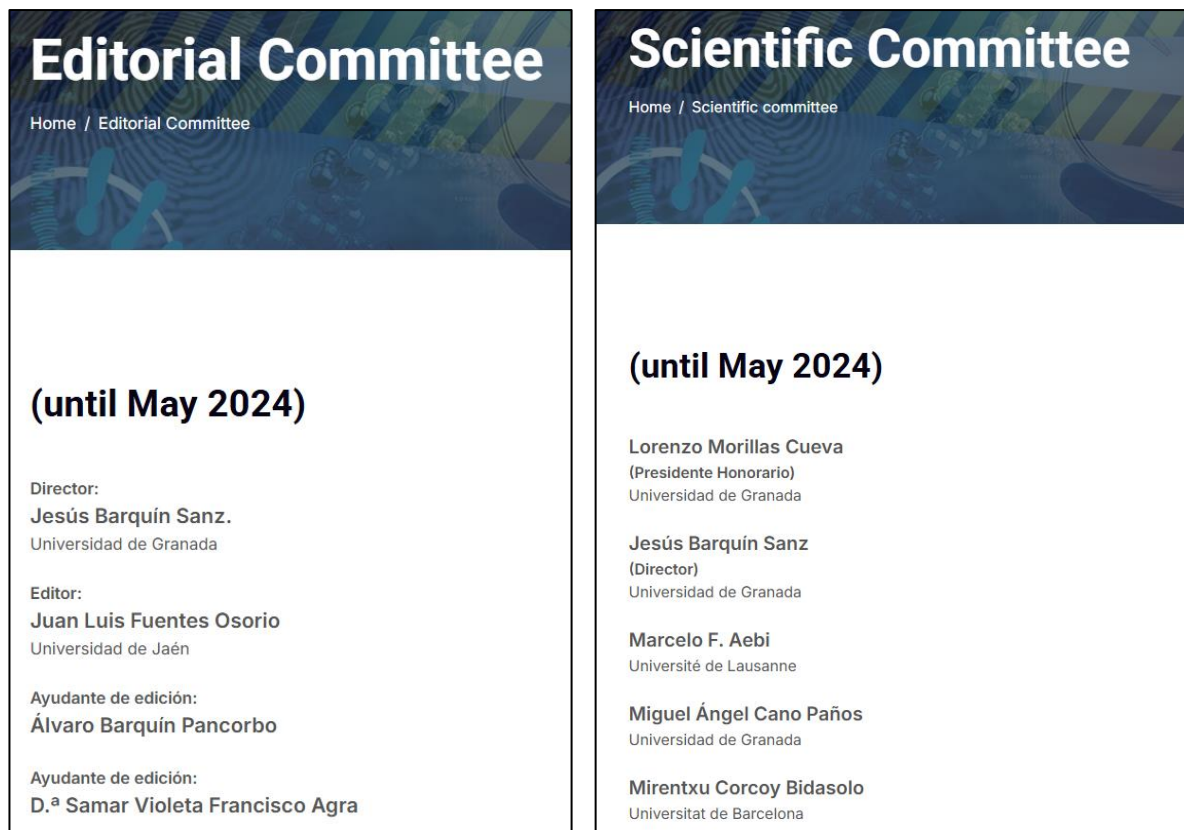
*Figure 1 Screenshot from the old RECPC website announcing the change in editorial management (captured on 2 October 2025)*

*[In English: In May/June 2024, the Revista Electrónica de Ciencia Penal y Criminología changed its editorial management and URL (<https://revistacriminologia.com>). On its original site ([criminet.ugr.es/recpc](http://criminet.ugr.es/recpc)), everything published since its creation in March 1999 up to May 2024 will remain permanently available. On the new domain, only the content incorporated from that date onwards will be accessible, along with the journal's historical content. All members of the Editorial Board (including the Director and the Editor) and of the Scientific Committee of RECPC ceased to have any link or responsibility with the journal as of 1 June 2024. The information contained on this page and in other pages hosted on the original site of RECPC is valid as of 20 May 2024. Since 1 June 2024, the Electronic Journal of Criminal Science and Criminology has been fully transferred to <https://revistacriminologia.com>. Any new submissions/publications in this journal will only be available on the new official website.]*

On 5 August 2024, a new domain name for the journal was registered<sup>6</sup>, and shortly thereafter the new website was launched. The site contained no information about the group now managing the journal. All articles published in RECPC up to that date appeared on the new portal. The names of the editorial team and scientific committee up to May 2024 were displayed in several places (Figure 2). One of the authors of this note appeared on the list of committee members.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://who.is/whois/revistacriminologia.com>



*Figure 2 Screenshots of the editorial committee and scientific committee (cropped) on the new RECPC website*

We consider that all articles published up to issue 24 of the journal correspond to the previous editorial management, whereas those in issue 25 (2025) are under the new management. Since the last week of September 2025 up to 3 October 2025, multiple articles appeared in RECPC, all of them in English, covering topics such as organised crime, youth gangs and digitalisation. The authors of this note have decided not to cite these new articles so as not to “whitewash” the problem described below.

The authors of the new articles come from the countries listed in Table 1. In addition to articles by authors claiming affiliation to Spanish universities, the remainder list affiliations to institutions in Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Bahrain. Our concern began when we noticed at least one author using the most common female first name in Spain (María) combined with two of the five most common Spanish surnames (García and López), alongside an implausible affiliation to a non-existent university: *the Universidad de Sevilla Metropolitana* (Metropolitan University of Seville). This pattern was repeated in at least three articles by purported researchers affiliated with other non-existent Spanish universities, such as the *Universidad de Castilla Urbana* (Urban Castilian University) and the *Universidad de Granada Sur* (South Granada University) (Figure 3).

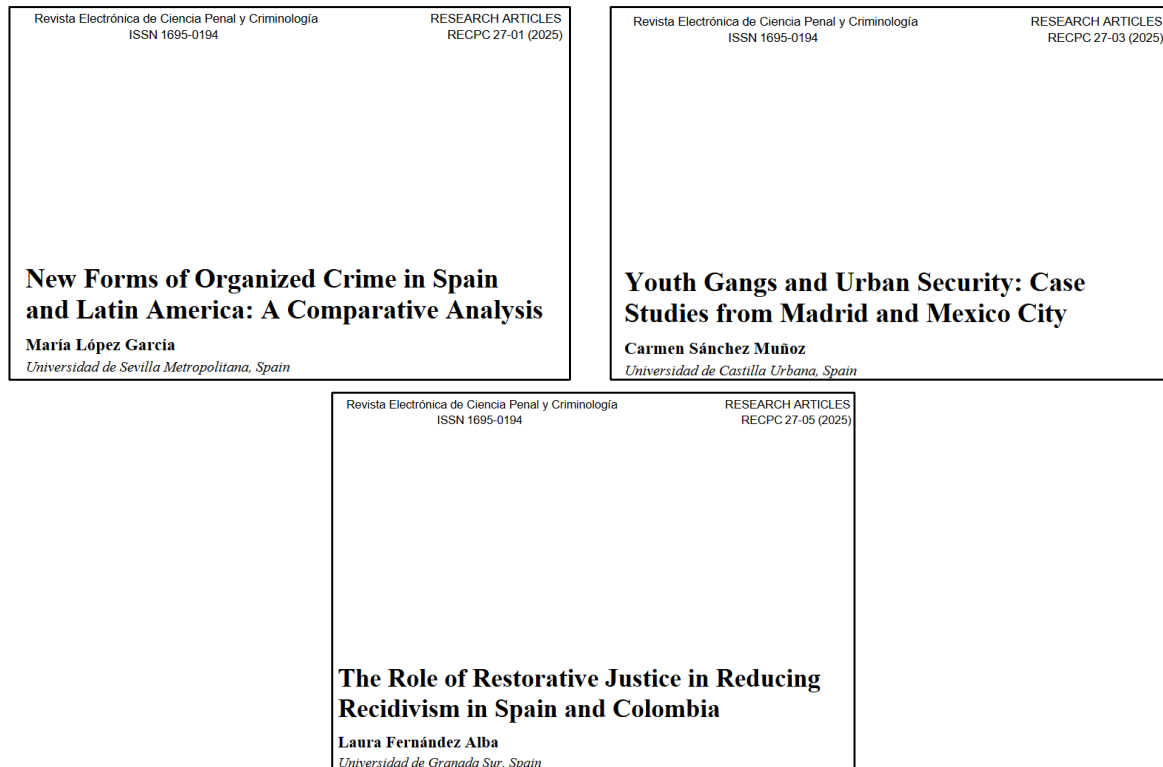
We therefore reviewed whether reliable evidence of the existence of the remaining authors could be found. By “reliable evidence of the existence of an organisation” we mean the presence of an institutional website. By “reliable evidence of the existence of a researcher” we mean at least ten Google search results unrelated to the current article, or an institutional profile, or a profile on ORCID, Google Scholar, or ResearchGate. Of the five Spanish

universities named in the latest issue, three do not exist; and there is no evidence that any of the authors affiliated with them exist either. All the named institutions in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Iraq appear to be real, but we found reliable evidence for only four of the eleven authors.

*Table 1 Authors of articles in RECPC issue 25 (up to 3 October 2025)*

Country	Affiliation	Author name
Spain	Universidad de Sevilla	María López García*
	Metropolitana*	
	Universidad de Castilla Urbana*	Carmen Sánchez Muñoz*
	Universidad de Granada Sur*	Laura Fernández Alba*
	Universidad del País Vasco	Pablo Díaz Navarro*
Bahrain	Universidad de Zaragoza	Isabel Martínez Cordero*
	Kingdom University	Omar Fakhri Alhadithi
Iraq	AL-Iraqia University	Walaa Hussein Khazzar*
		Hussein Jaber Hussein Al-Shweily*
	Iraqi Council of Representatives	Mustafa Abdullah Hasan
	Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research	Zaid Khalid Habib Al-Rawi*
	Saudi Electronic University	Mohamed Abdalla Hassan Hamad*
Saudi Arabia	Hail University	Hanan Abdel Moniem Gubara Elbashir*
	Shaqra University	Shihab Sulaiman Abdalla Osman
		Abdelfattah Mohamed Abdelfattah Hassan*
	Dhofar University	Ahmed O.K. Hosnia
	University of Bisha	Randa Osman Ahmed Abd Alwahab*

\* No “reliable” evidence of the existence of this institution or researcher on Google.



*Figure 3 Screenshots of three articles in RECPC issue 25 listing authors and affiliations for which no reliable evidence of existence could be found*

We also reviewed the coherence of the articles' content and the existence of the cited references. All published articles were of very low quality, well below the historical level of RECPC. It is highly probable that most (and probably all) of the new articles were entirely written by Large Language Models (LLMs). We recognise that human judgements about AI-generated text can be fallible and may lead to both false positives and false negatives (Ibrahim et al., 2023), yet there were clear indications consistent with fully fabricated, automated writing (Strzelecki, 2025). Typical signs include:

- (a) generic, repetitive phrasing and "boilerplate" academic text;
- (b) sections that do not correspond to the article title or abstract;
- (c) inconsistent or fictitious data tables and figures;
- (d) works that are misquoted or distorted; and
- (e) perfect grammar and style but no substantive originality.

Many, though not all, of the references listed actually exist.

Upon discussing these findings with the journal's former Editorial Committee, we were informed that RECPC had been acquired by a group called Oxbridge Publishing House. Recently, Martín-Martín and López-Cózar (2025) documented the predatory practices of this publisher, which follow a consistent pattern: acquiring journals indexed in international databases, increasing publication volumes originating from outside the journals' academic communities, and often escalating publication fees. Importantly, they also reported that other criminology journals, including some with an international profile, have been acquired by Oxbridge Publishing House. These include the *International Journal of Cyber Criminology*,



once a respected outlet in cybercrime studies, as well as the *International Journal of Criminal Justice Sciences*.

On 3 October 2025, following concerns about the journal's new direction, the founder and former director posted an urgent note on the legacy RECPC site (Figure 4). In it, he dissociated the former Editorial and Scientific Committees from the journal's new stage and raised doubts about the authorship and scholarly quality of the newly posted items.

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**NOTA URGENTE DEL FUNDADOR Y ANTIGUO DIRECTOR A 3 OCTUBRE 2025**

Durante los meses transcurridos entre junio de 2024 hasta la fecha y a pesar de que el acuerdo entre las partes preveía expresamente la plena desvinculación de quienes éramos antes responsables, en la web de la nueva etapa de la revista se siguen mencionando los nombres de los miembros del Comité Editorial y del Comité Científico. Ciertamente es que en todos los casos se indica expresamente "until May 2024", pero la práctica no deja de constituir un uso indebido de nuestras identidades. En reiteradas ocasiones he intentado hacer llegar a los nuevos responsables mi firme exigencia de que los retiren. Hasta ahora, sin respuesta de ningún tipo, lo que me llevó a incluir en esta misma página web la advertencia en negrita que sigue apareciendo más abajo. Sin embargo, puesto que hasta hace unos días la subsistencia de la cabecera de RECPC era meramente formal al no haber publicado ni un solo artículo nuevo, la cuestión consistía fundamentalmente en desvincularnos de unos criterios de gestión que repudiamos.

Ahora nos encontramos con un hecho nuevo que agrava sensiblemente la situación, ya que en fechas recientes se ha producido (y se está produciendo) la publicación de varios pseudoartículos en la nueva web de RECPC que resultan, cuando menos, sospechosos –y me quedo muy corto al elegir este adjetivo–. Por seguir con los eufemismos, hay serios motivos para pensar que su contenido y su autoría no responden a unos mínimos criterios de seriedad investigadora: centros inexistentes («Universidad de Granada Sur», «Universidad de Sevilla Metropolitana», «Universidad de Castilla Urbana»...); autores desconocidos con apellidos comunes (García, Sánchez, López, Fernández, Martínez...) que no aparecen en los directorios de las instituciones existentes a las que supuestamente pertenecen; emails de contacto invariablemente de outlook; textos con indicios de haber sido elaborados por IA. Dada la gravedad de estos burdos hechos, debo pararme de nuevo a expresar de modo rotundo una obviedad: estas prácticas editoriales son detestables, como sin duda opinan también todos los demás académicos vinculados a la etapa anterior de RECPC y todos los universitarios con un mínimo de integridad.

Como se ha dejado claro en esta propia página web desde el principio, la vinculación con la revista de mi persona, así como del editor y los ayudantes de edición, y de los miembros del Comité Científico, cesó definitivamente en mayo de 2024. En esta fecha, la cabecera de RECPC fue traspasada a un grupo editorial, Oxbridge Publishing House, cuya dudosa actividad no era aún conocida. Desde luego, si hubiera sabido lo que con posterioridad se fue haciendo público sobre ciertas prácticas editoriales depredadoras, habría cerrado simplemente la revista, en lugar de ceder su cabecera en la esperanza de que pudiera vivir una nueva etapa con bríos renovados (véase <http://criminol.ugr.es/recpc/26/recpc26-r2.pdf>). Iluso de mí, y primer perjudicado a la postre, pero no el único, por una decisión que ahora lamento profundamente.

Jesús Barquín Sanz, 3 de octubre de 2025

Figure 4 Note posted on the legacy RECPC website by the journal's founder and former director (3 October 2025)

[In English: URGENT NOTE FROM THE FOUNDER AND FORMER DIRECTOR. During the months from June 2024 to the present, and despite the agreement between the parties expressly providing for the complete disengagement of those of us formerly responsible, the names of the members of the Editorial Board and the Scientific Committee continue to be mentioned on the website of the new stage of the journal. It is true that in every case the phrase "until May 2024" is explicitly indicated, but this practice still constitutes a misuse of our identities. On repeated occasions I have tried to convey to the new managers my firm demand that they remove these names. So far, I have received no response of any kind, which led me to include on this very webpage the bold warning that still appears further down. However, since until a few days ago the continuation of the RECPC masthead was purely formal (no new article having been published) the issue consisted mainly in distancing ourselves from management criteria we repudiate. We now face a new development that seriously aggravates

*the situation, as in recent dates several pseudo-articles have been (and are being) published on RECPC's new website that are, to say the least, suspicious; and I am putting it very mildly in choosing that adjective. To continue with the euphemisms, there are strong reasons to believe that their content and authorship do not meet even minimal standards of research integrity: non-existent institutions ("Universidad de Granada Sur", "Universidad de Sevilla Metropolitana," "Universidad de Castilla Urbana"...); unknown authors with very common surnames (García, Sánchez, López, Fernández, Martínez...) who do not appear in the directories of the existing institutions to which they supposedly belong; invariably Outlook contact emails; texts showing signs of having been produced by AI. Given the seriousness of these crude facts, I must once again emphatically state an obvious truth: these editorial practices are detestable, as no doubt also think all the other academics linked to RECPC's previous stage and every university scholar with a minimum of integrity. As has been made clear on this same webpage from the outset, my connection with the journal, as well as that of the editor, the editorial assistants and the members of the Scientific Committee, ended definitively in May 2024. At that time, the RECPC masthead was transferred to a publishing group, Oxbridge Publishing House, whose questionable activity was not yet known. Of course, if I had known what later became public about certain predatory editorial practices, I would simply have closed the journal instead of handing over its title in the hope that it could live a new stage with renewed vigour. Naïve of me, and in the end the first harmed (though not the only one) by a decision I now deeply regret.]*

Taken together, these factors clearly suggest that, in its new stage, RECPC may have been converted into a factory for false articles; a so-called "paper mill". A paper mill is an organisation (sometimes disguised as a journal, sometimes selling manuscripts to authors) that produces fabricated or low-quality papers, often with fake authorship or data, for a fee. These papers are then submitted to journals to inflate publication counts or citation metrics (Byrne et al., 2024; Committee on Publication Ethics, 2022; Pérez-Neri et al., 2022).

There are several plausible reasons why RECPC may have been transformed in this way. The most likely explanation is that the new management seeks to boost the publication output of certain real universities so that these institutions rise in global rankings. Another, closely related, possibility is that the fabricated papers are designed to inflate the h-indices of genuine scholars by repeatedly citing their work. It is also conceivable that a once-prestigious journal is being repurposed as a predatory outlet in which authors pay to publish. When we tested the submission system, no fee was requested at the point of submission, but it remains unclear whether payment is demanded later in the process. A less probable, but not impossible, scenario is that these activities are intended to disrupt the scholarly publishing system more broadly.

After the publication of the preprint of this entry on CrimRxiv on 6 October 2025<sup>7</sup>, all articles with authors from non-existent universities, as well as some other articles published in September 2025, were deleted from the website. The editorial board was also removed from the journal website. This suggests that our preprint reached the new management group of the journal, who, concerned with the reputational damage, took measures to make the

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<sup>7</sup> <https://doi.org/10.21428/cb6ab371.11373ed7>

fraudulent and predatory practices less evident. The signs that the journal has been converted into a paper mill and predatory journal, however, remain.

In light of this evidence, it is imperative to take a clear stance. We will refrain from publishing in the journal and from citing any of its articles published from 2025 onwards, so as not to “whitewash” the problem. At the same time, we intend to alert relevant bodies and indexing services so that journals engaged in these practices lose their rankings and visibility. Only by doing so can we protect the integrity of scholarly communication.

We are therefore committed not only to distancing ourselves from RECPC’s recent practices but also to working with colleagues, editors and professional bodies to ensure that similar situations do not arise in other journals. By speaking openly about what we have found and by refusing to legitimise fraudulent publications, we aim to help safeguard the integrity and credibility of scholarly publishing for the wider academic community.

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