

Predatory Journals: Publish and Perish!

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Predatory journals solely exist for monetary profit without any commitment to publishing ethics or quality of research. Not only do they damage the reputation of individual researchers and institutions, but more dangerously, they pollute scientific and other disciplines.

The 'publish or perish' phenomenon for career advancement, has proved to be more harmful than good in academia all over the world. It requires mandatory publications not only for doctoral and post-doctoral fellowships, but also for faculty positions, promotions and other academic purposes. Researchers need considerable time to publish the results of their research in credible journals. However, the mandatory rules require it to be made public within a short period of time. The situation has been exploited by fraudulent publishers in the Open Access (OA) environment, in particular by encouraging them to take advantage of the 'Pay and Publish' model that Jeffery Beall (2012) labelled as 'Predatory Publishing'. Beall was the first to report such publishers on his blog, showing how these publishers have exploited the OA publishing model and have attracted gullible researchers and faculty members to publish in their journals. These scholars, desperate to meet publication norms for promotions, unknowingly fall prey to these publishers. Grudiewicz and others have defined predatory journals and publishers as

...entities that prioritize self-interest at the expense of scholarship and are characterized by false or misleading information, deviation from best editorial and publication practices, a lack of transparency, and/or the use of aggressive and indiscriminate solicitation practices (Grudniewicz, Moher, et.al. 2019).

The other reasons contributing to the growth of predatory journals include fear of job losses (for lack of publications), failure to publish in journals indexed in world recognized databases due to inadequate research skills, lack of awareness among new researchers and faculty members (Demir 2018).

Although predatory journals are reported more from developing countries (Seethapathy 2016), a few studies indicate that some publishers from developed countries are also involved in predatory publications (Bohannon 2013; Linacre 2019).

What are predatory journals?

It is difficult, especially for new researchers and faculty members, to identify predatory journals and publishers. Here are a few key features of such journals/publishers:

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1. *Misleading titles and other information*

- Use of misleading words such as “International”, “Global”, “World journal”, etc. in titles even though the journals lack the international scope and editorial board.
- These journals look as good as the standard legitimate journals.
- They copy the name, ISSN, logos, and website design of the journals published by standard publishers.
- Are cloned online versions of print-only authentic journals.

2. *Credibility*

- No contact details of publisher and editor are provided;
- false claims about editorial board members; sometimes, the members are included in the board without their knowledge;
- the peer review process is not in place or appears to be vague and ‘rapid’;
- very quick turnaround time for acceptance and publication of articles;
- articles are of low quality with several typographical errors and plagiarised text, and
- articles are from multiple disciplines in a kind of ‘hold-all’ fashion.

3. *False research measuring metrics*

- Fabricated, non-existent, misrepresented Impact Factor (IF) other than Journal Citation Report of Clarivate Analytics, and
- journals are included in payment-based sub-standard indexing databases

4. *Invitation and acceptance criteria*

- Spam emails inviting articles are sent to the authors;
- invitation to join the editorial board, and
- articles are generally accepted only after the payment of submission fees

Implications of predatory journals

Anyone can publish on any topic in predatory journals on payment, bypassing the peer review process, giving rise to serious implications. Publishing in predatory journals is not just a waste of time, money and efforts, but has more serious consequences for knowledge studies such as corruption in science and other disciplines especially in key sectors such as human health, along with damage to career of individual researchers and reputations of individual institutions. (<https://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2019/10/28/citation-contamination-references-to-predatory-journals-in-the-legitimate-scientific-literature/>). Thus, if the research results are published without scrutiny, doctors and other individuals may use false information leading to improper treatments and further research. In addition, journalists or media may mislead people when they publish information, without ascertaining journal credentials (predatory or legitimate). Consequently, information published in predatory journals, without any ‘peer review’, threatens the society at large with uncharted pitfalls (<https://healthydebate.ca/2020/07/topic/dangers-of-predatory-publishing>). In any discipline, articles published in such places, instead of advancing the methodology and knowledge, are likely to damage the discipline and mislead future researchers into pursuing the wrong line of thought.

Battle against predatory journals

The battle against predatory journals was initiated by Jeffrey Beall followed by organisations such as Kscien Organization for Scientific Research (<http://kscien.org/>) and Centre for Journalology, (<http://www.ohri.ca/journalology/>), an independent journalology centre set up by the Ottawa Hospital, Research Institute, Canada. Cabell's International has launched its commercial products viz. Jounalytics and Predatory Reports to list the predatory journals (<https://www2.cabells.com>).

Indian initiative

The University Grants Commission (UGC), New Delhi, a statutory body of the Government of India for higher education (<https://ugc.ac.in/>) established the Consortium for Academic and Research Ethics (CARE) in 2018 to combat predatory journals. The main objective of UGC-CARE initiative (<http://ugccare.unipune.ac.in>) is to develop, manage and update the UGC-CARE Reference List of quality journals (Patwardhan, 2019). The lack of awareness of unethical practices in publishing among researchers, is one of the main reasons for the rise of predatory journals in India. Therefore, UGC has come up with a mandatory two-credit course on "Research and Publication Ethics" to raise awareness among all PhD students. Recently, UGC has published a guidance document "Good Academic Research Practices (GARP)" (https://www.ugc.ac.in/e-book/grap_29092020/mobile/index.html) which offers recommendations for institutions to inculcate the culture of research integrity in any particular institution.

Choosing the right journals

- *Think.check.submit*: (<https://thinkchecksubmit.org>) This international, cross-sector initiative (members from COPE, DOAJ, OASPA, ISSN, etc.) helps researchers identify trusted journals and publishers for their research.
- *Journal finder*: Many publishers provide help to researchers to find and select the appropriate journal relevant to their topic of research. For example, Journal Finder by Elsevier (<https://journalfinder.elsevier.com/>), Springer Journal Suggester (<https://journalsuggester.springer.com/>), Wiley Journal Finder (<https://journalfinder.wiley.com/>), etc.

Guidelines for Research and Publication Ethics

- Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), UK (<http://publicationethics.org>)
- San Francisco declaration on research assessment (DORA) (<https://sfdora.org/>)
- Leiden manifesto for research metrics (<https://www.leidenmanifesto.org/>)
- The metric tide (<https://responsiblemetrics.org/the-metric-tide/>)
- The Hong Kong principles for assessing researchers: Fostering research integrity (<https://osf.io/m9abx/>)
- World Association of Medical Editors (WAME): (<http://wame.org/>)

Scholarly journals are the carriers of results of genuine research for the society and further research is always based on them. Credible journals follow stringent editorial and review practices and abide to the principles of publication ethics. These practices should not have been

overridden by making publications mandatory for academic purposes. Predatory journals solely exist for monetary profit without any commitment to publishing ethics or quality of research. Not only do they damage the reputation of individual researchers or institutions, but more dangerously, they pollute scientific and other disciplines. The authenticity and credibility of research are therefore at stake. The number of predatory publications with changing dynamics is on the rise and is one of the major challenges facing genuine researchers.

It is the primary responsibility of each individual researcher and mentor to keep away from unethical research and publishing practices and to remain worthy of an ethical ethos that is the foundation of a genuine scientific and academic effort.

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